

EDWARD L. LEE II

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Lee]

Q: Today is June 14, 1999. This is an interview with Edward L. Lee II. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Ed and I are old friends going back to Korea in the '70s. Ed, could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

LEE: I was born in 1944 in a place called Saginaw, Michigan, which is sort of in a thumb area if you look at the Lower Peninsula. It essentially was a working class community of about 70,000, of which probably 60% worked for General Motors. They have a number of plants that mushroomed up shortly after World War II. Within Saginaw, there were no colleges or universities. People that went to university usually went to Michigan State or to the University of Michigan. I went to school in Saginaw, Michigan. It was a parochial education which was a very disciplined education. Because of some sort of rather difficult personal family situations, I was not a good student.

Q: Could you talk about your family?

LEE: Sure. My mother was a clerk in a number of government agencies. My father was an engineer. They both were products of Saginaw or the surrounding area. I lived in Saginaw up until the time I was 17, when I went into the Marine Corps.

Q: What did a parochial education consist of at that time? Was it run by nuns?

LEE: It was run by nuns, very disciplined nuns, harsh corporal punishment. The question you raised about my signature is interesting. I started in a catholic school in the first grade. I was left handed. It was the 1940s. They tried to teach me to write cursive. Somehow it just wouldn't work. I had a hard time writing with my right hand. For a number of weeks, the nuns would slap my hands with very harsh rulers, sometimes making them bleed. They said, "You are going to write right handed" and I simply responded and said, "I just can't do it." If I had been educated at that time, I would have said, "I'm very left handed dominant," which would mean that being able to use my right hand would be very difficult. Long story made short, I never did learn to write. I could never write any kind of penmanship. So, the nuns finally said, "You're never going to amount to anything. Go ahead and do whatever you have to do, mark an X or print, whatever you can do to communicate, do that, because you're never going to learn how to write." So, as I found myself getting into the middle school years where you have to have an ID and various things, I realized, "I'm going to have to make up a signature," which is exactly what I did. So, the signature that you see before you is the signature I made up probably 45 or 48 years ago. So, it was a harsh education. It was a good education, very disciplined, going to church every morning before school. Every teacher was a religious nun. A high quality education, but very tough.

Q: Was there much in the way of intellectual challenge or was it mainly memorizing?

LEE: The system was designed not for you to think but to repeat, to regurgitate what you had been told, whether it was Latin, French, English, social studies, government, whatever. So, you didn't challenge anything at any level. "This is the way it is. This is the way it was. I want you to tell me what I told you."

Q: There must have been a point where you had to write something, answers to quizzes, spelling, that sort of thing.

LEE: I did what anyone in my shoes would have done. I communicated only in the form that I could use, and that was in print. I found out that because other students were writing, they were writing quicker than I was, so it was taking me longer to complete a quiz or an exam or to write an essay. So, I soon learned that if you're going to survive and if you're ever going to get out of this system, you're going to have to learn to print faster. So, in time, I learned how to do that pretty well. To this day, I only print.

Q: Were your mother and father college educated? Did you have brothers and sisters? Was there much talk at the table?

LEE: My mother had graduated from high school. She had gone to the Catholic school that I ended up going to. My father went to a public high school. He was an engineer but not a college educated engineer. But he went to what was then known as a technical school. He was a mechanical engineer, but not college educated. I had no brothers and sisters. My mother and father were divorced when I was about 11. My father sort of rode off into the sunset never to return. He did nothing in the way of financial support. It was very tough. This would have been the early to mid-'50s. My mother worked very hard. I was just talking a moment ago about the fact that she now has Alzheimer's. About a year ago, I relocated temporarily to Michigan, where I could get her the care she needed and that kind of thing. So, I owe her an awful lot. She was a wonderful mother and nurturer to me, gave me a lot of good goals and beliefs that I have today.

Q: At school, with your classmates, you said it was a working class town. Was it an ethnic town?

LEE: It was very ethnic. If you look at the city of Saginaw, which at that time was around 70,000, 50-60% were Polish-German, primarily Polish and German. There really within the school system, I would say 80% of children in school were products of the working class or blue collar people. You would have the local elite, the people that owned car dealerships, that taught at schools, people that had some sort of professional jobs dentists, doctors, lawyers, those people were a minority. It was a blue collar town. The professional discussions that took place didn't exist in most families. You would not have people talking about the politics and what was going on nationally or internationally. It was more, if you go back to Maslow's hierarchy, everybody was worried about survival, paying the bills, buying a car. A lot of people didn't even have cars. People walked. They took the bus. People were worried about the day to day realities of surviving.

Q: What about unions? Did they play much of a role?

LEE: The United Auto Workers [UAW] became very big in Michigan because the auto industry, the working class people, wanted more benefits, more this, more that. It really was a union town in many respects. Unions didn't really become big in the U.S. until the early '50s. By the mid to late '50s, they were very powerful. That would not be the case today as we get to the millennium.

Q: Did the nuns take political sides? Was the world being filtered through the nuns? I'm thinking of McCarthyism and the threat of communists.

LEE: I was in elementary school from about 1952 to about '54 or '55. I went into high school in 1958. I had never heard of the word "McCarthyism." There were no mixes of ethnic groups, particularly racial groups. We did have a black community in Saginaw. We never had anyone of black race in any of the schools I went to. I first encountered different races when I went into the Marine Corps at the age of 17 in 1962. But it was not a stimulating environment. It was regurgitation of what you had been told. Even the nuns in teaching did not throw things up in the air and say, "Would that this had happened versus that? What if we had lost the war? What if we really had not grown industrially? What if we were all speaking German?" There was no grey. It was all black and all white.

Q: Sometimes young people in that type of environment retreat into a world of books and all this. Some go into sports.

LEE: Catholic or parochial schools at that time were not heavily into athletics. They had no physical education programs, so you were involved in sport and I played basketball and hockey. But I found that the sports really did not fulfill the kind of thing I was looking for. I became probably a library brat, where what I was not getting in school I would get at the library. Often, I would go to the library and spend hours there. There, there were things that I could reach out to that were unavailable to me in school. I was very interested in other countries, in what went on in the world that I was not familiar with.

Q: Do any particular books come to mind?

LEE: A book that, up until the time I was in high school, I read and a book that I really can remember so well today was *The Caine Mutiny*, a phenomenally good book. It's a great book because it shows you how people really are, how selfish they can be, how politics work, how a legal system can work. I ended up reading *The Caine Mutiny* probably three times in the next 10-15 years. I always got a different view from it. Orwell's book, *1984*, *Animal Farm* was another one. I read a good number of books that had come out after the war about the whole World War II period and the Depression. Those left an indelible mark on me. But I really was interested in other countries' culture, why they were different, how they worked, where they were. Even today in the late 1990s, if you were to stop in any average sized town in the United States and ask somebody where Zimbabwe is, they wouldn't be able to tell you. Unless you're really attuned to the international community, it's not a big issue. This is still a very monolingual world in the United States.

Q: It sounds like you were having trouble in school, particularly the handwriting must have thrown you way off on things, and with the divorce. It sounds like it was not a completely happy, idyllic childhood.

LEE: Oh, no. It was not happy at all. My father was really a very sociopathic kind of person. He really did not have any responsibility to his family before he had left. My mother was working a couple of jobs. I was having difficulty in school because of my writing. The divorce, the economic hardship, made it difficult for me to get good grades. Because of my mother's inability to really make ends meet, when I was 14, I went to work in a drugstore and probably worked as much as the law would allow at that time. So, because I was working, and because of the other emotional things going on in my life, my grades really began to slip. Throughout most of high school, I was getting Ds and Fs in most subjects. Where I excelled was in languages and things like government. I was very selective. I would get good grades in things I was interested in. In other things that I saw no point to, I would get very bad grades. It was sort of a given that I would never get into a college, that given the background and the environment and my poor grades and my inability to really write, that I would be a failure for the rest of my life.

Q: How about typing? Or was a typewriter too expensive?

LEE: Typing was available. They taught it at the school I went to. I actually did have a typewriter. One thing I was involved in in high school was journalism. I think you'll find out later in our discussions that writing has been a big part of my life even in the Foreign Service and particularly after it. But we did have a typewriter at home. We did have a television and a telephone. Until the early '50s, a lot of people did not have telephones. A lot of people did not have cars. So, I think if you fast forward to the '90s when it's common for most people in high school to have a car of their own, that's really quite different.

Q: The first car I ever really owned, and that one I had to share with my wife, was when I came into the Foreign Service. It worked at the time very nicely, thank you, because we didn't live in the suburbs.

The Marine Corps. Was this an escape?

LEE: The Marine Corps was a great experience. It was 1962. I barely graduated from high school. It was a gift that they gave me a diploma. I think they just wanted to get rid of me. I couldn't write very well. I was somewhat of a problem student. I was holding students back in some classes. So, I think they were glad to get rid of me. Then I began to look at my options. I couldn't get into even a community college and that would have been a long drive. Clearly, I couldn't get into a university. My family was such that my mother couldn't have afforded to send me to college even if I had good grades. The idea of having scholarships back in that era was pretty atypical. So, I looked at my options and said, "Well, I can continue to work at the drugstore for minimum wage. I can go to work in a factory, which does not appeal to me at all. Or I can get the hell out of here and join a branch of the Armed Forces." Having been raised in Michigan, I loved the water. I loved boats and canoes and ships and that kind of thing. I said to myself, "I'm going to join the Coast Guard." A very well meaning organization. You're on the water, you're outdoors, you're active, you're rendering a public service, you're saving people's lives. So, I went down to the post office in Saginaw and it was about probably 11:50 in January 1962. The desk where the Coast Guard recruiter was was vacant and had a sign out that said, "Out to lunch." Directly next to that desk was the Marine Corps desk. The Marine Corps recruiter was there. He asked me what I was doing. I said, "I'm waiting for the Coast Guard recruiter to come back because I want to join the Coast Guard." He began to tell me that it was a very limiting kind of organization, they weren't really military, and it was more like a small police force that was on the water. He began to show me these brochures and pictures of Marines in dress ball uniforms and all this great training that you would get and you would learn a skill and be better in so many respects. He told me, "You can go live in California. You can do this. You're going to see the world." Well, he never told me about the fact that you can actually get into war and be killed, that it was really pretty harsh, tough training; emotionally it was probably tougher than it was physically. And the Coast Guard guy never came back. So, finally, being somewhat of an obsessive compulsive kind of person, I said, "Let's do it." I filled out the forms. I was 17 years of age. My mother had to sign, so I took the forms home and she began to cry and I said, "This is really the best thing." So, I got her to sign the forms. A month later, after I graduated, I left. I went to boot camp and discovered that it really is a pretty harsh experience. I stayed in the Marine Corps for seven years.

Q: Where did you get your training?

LEE: I went to the Marine recruit depot in San Diego, California, for about three months. It was very physically harsh. There was an awful lot of physical abuse. If you didn't do what you were told and do it quickly, you usually were slugged, you were kicked. If you didn't put the bullet at 500 yards on the target where somebody wanted it, you would taste blood in your mouth, having just been hit in the face. After a while, you learned that to avoid that discomfort, you really wanted to get it right, you wanted to do the right thing, and so you became sort of an overachiever to make sure that those bad things didn't happen.

Q: Let's talk about the Marine experience after boot camp. What did they do?

LEE: Then they send you off to what they call advanced infantry training. That is a period of about two months where you go out and learn all the tactics of how to be an infantryman. I had been told that I would learn a skill in the Marine Corps. That turned out not to be the case. The skill I learned was really how to kill people. I became an infantryman. I eventually went to Vietnam. I discovered that all this talk of skills really maybe was for somebody else. I had a very high IQ according to the ratings but for some reason because of where I had come from, Michigan, a certain group of people were automatically put into the infantry and some went into aviation and some were given other skills and that kind of thing. So, for seven years, I was basically a squad leader. I moved up in the ranks and became a sergeant. I actually liked it up until the time Vietnam came along. Then I found out that there were a lot of things that weren't nearly as bad as getting hit in boot camp.

Q: When did you go to Vietnam?

LEE: I went to Vietnam in March of 1965, which was really the first landing or the official deployment of troops beyond advisors in Vietnam. I went to Da Nang.

Q: That's where you all went in.

LEE: Right. I spent some time briefly in Chu Lai. Mainly in the early years it was not as bad as during the period of Tet and thereafter. We had engagements. We had losses. There were some things in Vietnam in the Marines that dispelled what people have seen in movies. There was not drugs. The entire period I was in Vietnam, I don't know a person who used drugs. That whole thing was either a manufacture of Hollywood or happened to somebody else.

Q: I also think it happened later, too. I think it was after Tet.

LEE: Demoralization was a big part of that.

Q: The Marines had a record of having these? Were you in a core infantry unit or in the civil action type of programs?

LEE: We were primarily patrolling roads. We'd try to get the ARVN, the Vietnamese soldiers, to participate in patrols with us. That didn't go too well. We had problems in that we had bad weapons for Vietnam. We had been trained with a rifle called the M14, which was a very good rifle for different types of tactics but in jungles, for example, it had a flash suppressor at the end of it. If you were going through a thicket or a jungle and you banged it against something or somebody, that flash suppressor would get bent. The next time you fired rounds through it, the rounds would be sheared off. It was not until '67 or '68 that they came up with the AR15 and the M16 and that kind of thing. We had a hard time. We had heavy losses in Quang Mi and Quang Tri, which another one of our units was in. One of our companies lost 70%, which is a lot of people. Most of the people that I went through boot camp with died. Very few survived. I sometimes wonder how I sort of escaped it all, but I did.

Q: What was the feeling within your Marine unit about the war?

LEE: You take a group of young people that probably come from the lower socioeconomic part of the system, not well educated, don't understand macroeconomics and politics and things like that. You don't really think about it. You're basically told, "You're here to save your country." In actuality, that's not what Vietnam was all about. Vietnam was about political paranoia and economics. Everybody thought they were fighting for their country. They really weren't. They were fighting for someone else's political agenda. The 63,000 people that died in Vietnam during '61-'75 in many respects died for nothing. Maybe a lot of people wouldn't share that, but that's the way I view it. You have somebody like McNamara, who had been the former Secretary of Defense, who really helped get Vietnam off the ground during the Kennedy administration, wrote a book a few years ago basically stating that he made a mistake in pushing this whole Vietnam period. Well, why say it now? The money that he earned from that book should have been donated to the survivors of Vietnam KIAs (killed in action). But it goes to show you how politics works. It's very imprecise, it's very unscientific. I think my general feeling about the war is, it was wrong, it took the lives of a lot of people, it achieved no political objective, it was never an ulterior war, it was a political war.

Q: What was your reaction and that of your comrades about the ARVN, the South Vietnamese army?

LEE: There was an awful lot of prejudice by us, a good bit of it unjustified. We were harsh on the Vietnamese because we didn't understand them. We didn't understand where they came from or anything about their history. I had one advantage in that before I went to Vietnam I spent six months in the Vietnamese language school. So, I understood things about Vietnam that a lot of people didn't understand. Basically Vietnamese, North or South, really didn't care who was in charge. They just wanted to be able to plant their crops. They wanted to be left alone. I think we made a lot of big mistakes in not educating our military better about Vietnam. But there was an awful lot of prejudice, racism if you will, calling Vietnamese all kinds of terrible names. It was definitely a black hour in U.S. history.

Q: They gave you an aptitude test and found out you were good in languages?

LEE: Yes. I spent the first couple of months in Vietnam teaching infantrymen how to speak certain things in Vietnamese when they would go into villages. It was by no means a high level of Vietnamese but it was basically certain questions to ask, directions, the nuances of getting around and that kind of thing.

Q: Did you find yourself being used as "Hey, let's get Sergeant Lee to tell them what??"

LEE: Yes. I would say that there were times when I felt my loyalties were a little bit mixed because I was being asked to fulfill objectives I really didn't agree with. Actually, when I left Vietnam and when I got out of the Marine Corps, I wrote a number of letters to the editor that were pretty harsh about the Vietnam War, namely just to vent my feelings toward it.

Q: Having spent seven years in the Marine Corps, this was more than just getting out of your hometown. It sounds like you might be becoming what was known as a "lifer," a career Marine. Was it Vietnam that changed you?

LEE: After I left Vietnam, I got back to the United States. I really wanted to stay in the Marine Corps. They came around wanting someone to go to Marine security guard school. I could see the handwriting on the wall. This was 1967. I knew that if I went back to the United States and I didn't get out of the infantry, I'd be going back there. That didn't appeal to me at all. So, when someone said, "Look, you have the opportunity of living in Paris and wearing civilian clothes and having something close to a real life," I said to myself, "This is a good opportunity." I went on line embassy duty, which was very plush for a Marine, and I ended up going back to Vietnam, to Saigon. I spent a year in Saigon as a Marine security guard. I continued to go up in rank. Then I was assigned a year after that just before Tet to Bangkok where I became in charge of the Marine security detachment. I would have probably continued in the Marine Corps, but I began to see things that were different from what I had been used to and I made the decision to get out of the Marine Corps in 1968.

Q: Tell me about being a Marine security guard in Saigon. Were you there when they had the new embassy?

LEE: I was there during the old embassy. The new embassy was under construction. There were an awful lot of bombings in Saigon at that time. In fact, I was working in a building where a bomb had gone off and I was knocked about 100 feet down the hallway. Fortunately, I was not seriously injured. But there was an awful lot of city type attacks. MPs were being shot and killed. Bombs were being thrown. Hand grenades? It was not by any means a really healthy environment either. It was very unpredictable. We had a large Marine security guard detachment in Vietnam about that time. About 100 Marines. I left literally three months before Tet. One of the Marines that I had trained was the only Marine security guard to have been killed in combat in the Marine Security Guard Program, Marshall. He was up on the wall of the new embassy and was killed.

Q: When you were in Bangkok, what were you thinking about doing?

LEE: I began to look at where I was going. I began to realize that if the U.S. could get itself into a war like Vietnam, I sure didn't want to be another puppet in fulfilling that notion. I made a conscious decision by the time I got to Bangkok and now I was a staff sergeant I could have stayed in and probably retired as a sergeant major, but I was nixed by a lot of bad feelings, questions, doubts, and I knew that I couldn't see this through until the end. So, I completed my assignment in Bangkok. I did a good job. I had a good career. I got great evaluations. I would have gone on and done very well. But I chose in 1968 when I got back to get out of the Marine Corps and to start college. So, that sort of ended my Marine Corps period.

Q: Where did you go to college and what were you pointed towards?

LEE: My father eventually got himself into trouble and committed a couple of felonies at the federal level under U.S. law and ended up going to prison. I think as I was getting out of the Marine Corps, I said, "I want to get a college education, but I want to get it in something that I can practically use." I think because of what I had seen in the Marine Corps, my father going off to prison, I leaned toward law enforcement. So, I decided to major in law enforcement. I started off in Delta College in Michigan, a small community college. Then when I decided to get married maybe six months later, I ended up going to Washington, DC, where I went to American University, where I got a bachelor of science degree in law enforcement. I then went on later and got a master's degree in forensic science. I think I was leaning toward law enforcement police work. It was very attuned to what I was familiar with. I was familiar with guns and weapons and certain enforcement protocols and so that's what I leaned toward.

Q: Getting married and going to college, did you have a job on the side?

LEE: No, I didn't. I was very lucky. Some people could say hearing this story that this is not a lucky person. But actually I consider myself quite fortunate. I had done my time. I had gotten the discharge. I had the GI Bill. So, I had the advantage of not only getting the bachelor's degree at the expense of the U.S. government but almost a master's degree. I went to school full-time. I did not work at all. My wife worked. I went through from beginning to end, completed my BS program in 23 months. I took 21 semester hours every semester and I took 15 hours every summer. So, I got my bachelor's degree in about half the time that most people take it. You have to realize that I was in college in a baccalaureate program when all of the anti-war demonstrations were underway. They were particularly substantial at American University in Washington, DC. So, here I was, I was trying to get an education and yet I was basically hearing everyone say how bad anyone was that was in the military. There were veterans. We had some interesting discussions with people that were in college at the time.

Q: Were they two different worlds?

LEE: Yes. I never had a normal college education. I was never in a fraternity. I didn't care about girls because I was married. To me, it was business. I knew what the objective was and this goes back to part of my Marine training. You figure out what the objective is and carve out a plan and you fulfill that objective. I did it the same way when I went to college. The nuns that told me I would never amount to anything would have been very surprised that I graduated from a fairly good school with a 3.96. I graduated with honors. It was a double major, so I got the BS degree. I was able to say to myself, "They were wrong."

Q: This shows the motivation of the nuns.

LEE: Yes. You take those harsh nuns and then you take the Marine Corps experience and you become a pretty good survivor in dealing with the system.

Q: Where did you meet your wife and what's her background?

LEE: My wife and I met in Bangkok. She was a Foreign Service secretary. She was a part of the intelligence community. We got to know each other in Bangkok. I left earlier than she did. I went back to the United States. I got out of the Marine Corps, got enrolled in college, and we got married six to nine months later.

Her background, she had a baccalaureate degree from the University of Michigan. She was from Michigan originally, although I had never known her there. So, we were somewhat different in our backgrounds. Her father had been one of the founding fathers of the CIA, had worked very closely with Donovan, who had founded the OSS. Her father had been a good friend in the business world of Bill Colby, who would later become director of the CIA and what have you. So, her background was different from me educationally and just generally. But I really gravitated to university education. I loved learning. I did well in getting my bachelor's degree and I also graduated with honors with my master's degree.

Q: You got out when?

LEE: I graduated from American University in 1971. Then, it was decision time. What am I going to do now? I majored in law enforcement, so I pretty much knew that either I was going to be a cop or I was going to go into the federal government in a law enforcement capacity. Because of my exposure in Foreign Service as a Marine security guard, I really was interested in the bigger scheme of things. I had applied for a position at the CIA, at the FBI, and the State Department. The FBI told me that it would be six to nine months before they would even be able to consider my application. This was a period when you had to have either a law degree or an accounting degree. So, people that did not have those degrees sort of had to wait in line. The CIA came in with a job offer and I think you'll find this to be very interesting. They came in very quickly. I had gone through the physical exam and the psychological evaluation. I had taken the polygraph. I was literally hours from being appointed. I went out to their headquarters in Langley. I really didn't know a lot about what I was going to be doing. I figured that I would be put into some sort of training program and do what people in the CIA do. They collect information and they analyze it. Maybe they go overseas. Maybe they don't. I really didn't care. Then they told me what they were going to do. They said that within two months after I had entered the CIA, I would be going to Fort Benning, Georgia. I knew from my military experience that there is a jump school there. Well, I never had been real fond of heights. I didn't like heights when I was in the Marine Corps and was jumping out of helicopters. I figured that if somebody's going to ask me to jump out of a plane, this must be quite different from working behind a desk. I had gotten married. I was planning to have a couple of children. The sort of military kind of life was no longer in the equation. Then I began to ask some questions. This was about 10:00AM and we were supposed to be sworn in that afternoon and we'd be going through all kinds of training. I said, "Why Fort Benning?" He said, "Maybe somebody didn't tell you, but you're going to be going to Fort Benning to go to jump school. Then after jump school, we're going to send you to Vietnam." All of a sudden, I got a very cold feeling and I realized that this was not going to be a normal position. This was going to be a paramilitary position. I was going to Vietnam to really work with probably Cambodian and Vietnamese communities working against the North Vietnamese. I said to them, "I've been there. I've done that. I don't really care for it. I didn't like it. And I sure don't want to go back. And I sure don't want to jump out of an airplane. I'm out of here." I put on my coat and left and turned the position down.

About two months later, I was offered a position with the Office of Security at the State Department. This was the predecessor organization of Diplomatic Security. Right up my alley. Protecting people and places and information. So, in late 1971, I was appointed as special agent in the Office of Security. I had some interest in getting beyond the security piece but never did. Then I spent the next 20 years primarily overseas.

When I left the State Department in 1984 as Associate Director of Security to become Assistant IG at AID, it had been a good career and I really enjoyed it. I served in a number of different places as RSO. I had done everything I could possibly do and actually I ended up leaving the Foreign Service early because my wife at that point had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and I knew that if I had stayed within the Diplomatic Secretary niche, it would have been harder to find an assignment in the States.

Q: Going back to '71, what sort of training did you get?

LEE: I got no training. I went to the Foreign Service orientation program. The beauty or the uniqueness of the Office of Security at that time is that they were very good at selecting people. They were selecting people primarily with very diverse backgrounds that could deal with the threats of terrorism at that time that we were confronting at a lot of posts. You had ambassadors kidnaped, embassies blown up, people surveilled, kidnaped, killed, and what have you. The Office of Security at that time, SY, basically was looking for people that could manage overseas security programs. There was no policy. There were no procedures. There was no training. It was such a great position because you really had to perform within your own devices. There was no support mechanism. No one was telling you how to do it. You figured out a way to do it within the confines of a system and you were in a support mechanism. You complemented the Foreign Service and its needs. You worked long hours. You didn't get paid overtime. You didn't get a lot of sympathy for what you were doing. But it was dynamic and exciting and I really enjoyed it.

Q: You came in in '71. Where did they send you?

LEE: In 1971, I was assigned to what was then known as the Washington Field Office, where special agents that were a part of SY were assigned primarily to do investigative work. A lot of that involved background investigations, participating in protecting foreign dignitaries.

An interesting historic piece. For the last 10 years, I've been teaching at George Washington University in their graduate school. I had one of my students a couple of years ago do a study of the security organization at State going back to 1905. It was very interesting. The predecessor organization of SY was an office called the Chief Special Agent of the State Department, which at that time even before World War I, that position essentially fulfilled what later became CIA and the investigative arm of the State Department, later to become SY. The Chief Special Agent's Office literally protected heads of state, foreign dignitaries, as was appropriate at that time. But that's a whole other interesting part of history. If you're interested, I'll give you a copy of that report. It may be of value to you. In fact, this student went to the Library of Congress and went through reams of paper and official documents and it was fascinating how we worked from a security standpoint in 1915 and that period of time.

Q: You were in the Field Office from when to when?

LEE: From 1971 until 1972.

Q: What were you doing?

LEE: Primarily investigations. I somehow developed an interest in passport and visa fraud. That was a big priority in the early '70s because we began to realize both in the Office of Consular Affairs and also in the Office of Security what a big problem we had with fraudulent documents and visas and passports. Passport fraud was beginning to be used by drug traffickers and various other people. I would say 60% of my work was background checks. 30-40% was involved in other investigative activity. Sometimes we would be involved in a misconduct investigation. The Office of the Inspector General at that time was not doing waste, fraud, and mismanagement as it did after the enactment of the IG act in 1978. So, SY was doing anything right up to referral for prosecution in cases where Foreign Service employees had broken a federal law. Leak investigations were very big in the early '70s.

Q: Could you explain what that is?

LEE: A leak investigation, you almost have to look at it from the standpoint that this was the period of the Pentagon Papers. It was the period of the downfall of a presidency. You had a lot of forces working in the federal government, often against each other. The power of the media was beginning to have an enormous effect on the Foreign Service. Up until 1980 or '85, media was not as powerful as it is today. What we began to see in the early '70s, for one political reason or another, people working for a government agency like the State Department, the Foreign Service, would for their own political objectives leak information to journalists and reporters. SY got somehow sucked into being a part of this, which did not help them in terms of their relationship with the rest of the State Department. Somebody had to do it, so as SY we often ended up doing it. They usually went nowhere. The leads were often dry. No one ever was really indicted or prosecuted or even punished.

Q: Usually the leaks were at the top anyway.

LEE: Exactly. I think it's important to point out that if we look at the Foreign Service in even 1965 and the Foreign Service today, the media in American society has become nearly a parallel government. The U.S. government itself does nothing without immediately assessing the impact in terms of the media. There are very few secrets today because of the power and the carnivorous nature of the media. Clearly, protecting our civil rights is a part of the media, but history will probably show that we'll never go back to the period when it actually is protecting information.

Q: What were you looking for? When you do background checks, these are usually people who are being hired by the State Department. We kind of know what we want. What didn't we want in a background?

LEE: There was a law that is still in place called Executive Order 10450. That goes back to the '60s. It authorized federal agencies to investigate people that were coming to work for the U.S. government. There were certain criteria that you would look at.

We did not want at that time people that were involved in activity of moral turpitude. We did not want people that were not loyal Americans. What a loyal American is or is not was never quite well defined. But we were hoping that people would hold up their hand and say they would be loyal to the Constitution and the system of government, they would not attempt to overthrow it, and what have you. Even in the early '70s, the Cold War was well underway. There was a threat of communist aggression worldwide. There was a threat of nuclear superiority. So, there were a lot of things we did not want. We did not want spies or homosexuals. The belief at that time was that if your sexual orientation was other than heterosexual, you could be coopted, recruited, blackmailed. Thereby, a very senior person in the Department of State could be forced, coopted, coerced to turn over documents, violate their loyalty to the United State and what have you. We've learned a lot since then. But we did not want people with bad credit, criminal records, homosexuals, drunks? These were all risks that we were not prepared to accept. Unfortunately, during the early periods that I was in the Foreign Service, people didn't have that many rights. If the Department chose to turn you down for a position, the ability to get equal treatment under the law was not guaranteed.

Q: Were you finding many subversive lists, belonging to organizations that were considered subversive?

LEE: In the years in which I had conducted investigations for SY, I never really ran across anyone that was rejected for being a member of a subversive organization. I think you have to understand that the government generally is very conservative. The government is generally less flexible. They're looking for people that will fit into the mold, follow a disciplined regiment, and adhere to it. People that had been involved in anti-war activity often were suspect. People that had used marijuana often were rejected simply because they had used marijuana even one time. As time went on as we got into the '80s and '90s, experimentation with marijuana was okay, but regular use up until the time you walked into the interview room was not. So, I think we've learned a lot over a period of time. But the anti-war period was a period where there were a lot of people that were judged on what they had done during the anti-war period as if that jeopardized their loyalty to the U.S. government. I don't think that was actually true.

Q: Usually the best and the brightest at universities were out there throwing rocks at government facilities, including our present President, William Clinton. Was the attitude within yourself and your fellow security officers that "these are a bunch of pinkos?"

LEE: There was a lot of that. We didn't get real frenetic about it, but you have to realize that in the early '70s, federal employees, agents, military intelligence, police departments, the federal government, were violating the rights of individual Americans routinely. It was not the litigious society it later became. People did not have recourse. People were called "pinkos." They were called "leftists." They were called "anti-war fanatics." We were looking for the best and the brightest in American universities, particularly in the Foreign Service track. I think we got that. I think we worked very hard between the personnel function of the Department and the security function in being able to live with ourselves in terms of where somebody came from, but we were looking for people with good aptitudes, language skills, knowledge of the world, and academic education, preferably a good one, people who could write well, who could articulate themselves well, who could debate, who could explain what the U.S. is doing and how it does it and that kind of thing. On balance, despite the subjectiveness and the lack of due process, we really brought very good people into the Foreign Service.

Q: When I came into the Foreign Service in 1955, I had already been in the Air Force and the Security Service, so I didn't have any problems, but I've talked to others who were coming out, felt they had a problem in dealing with the security officers. Many of them had been brought up by nuns and come from an Irish catholic approach to sex, that if you were in bed with your wife, you'd turn the lights out before performing any functions, not a very experimental group. A new freedom was coming and they felt that they didn't get a very sympathetic treatment about some of the fun they had had in college. Was this a problem?

LEE: The period of free love, the period of Height Ashbury and Woodstock and free expression sort of helped us become who we later were. There was a lot of jaundiced eye looks at people even if their academic background was good and they scored well on the Foreign Service exam and did well on the orals and what have you. When they got to the point of getting the clearance, that became a very unpleasant experience. There were no real guarantees of what could and could not be asked. If you were asked, "How would you describe your sexual orientation," quite often people that were raised in the '50s or '60s would not lie, they would simply tell the truth. We'd always been told that if you tell the truth, how can you be wrong? Well, in telling the truth, you end up not being hired. So, people really looked at the security organization, SY, the Office of Security, as this potential group of thugs that could deprive you of being employed. During the late '60s/early '70s, we grappled with those things. We grappled with policies relating to marijuana. In the very early '70s, if someone had come out and said that they had used marijuana, they would have been denied employment almost summarily without as much as "here's an appeals process to have this evaluated." As we went on, we began to look at the law, began to look at individual rights, case law was developing as a result of the Civil Rights Act and other factors, and we became a lot more enlightened than we were during the early '70s.

Q: Was anybody reviewing you as you were doing this and saying, "Go easy on this?" Or was it left to each agent?

LEE: No, there was a policy. If a person said they were homosexual, that usually meant terminating the interview, documenting what had been said, and that would be reviewed by a higher authority. Usually, a woman that was living with someone was viewed very negatively. A woman who was divorced was almost looked at as a prostitute in some circles within the old SY organization. It was a very black and white environment. I looked more at what I was asked to investigate and collect. Because of my mixed feelings about the Vietnam War, I was probably a lot more flexible than others. I think the people that had been raised in very anti-communist families? I never encountered that, so it was not a piece of baggage that I brought along with me. Because of my good education and law enforcement emphasis on law, I was a lot more forgiving than others that, for example, had come from military intelligence, where they viewed it as a right to peer into the personal lives of people.

Q: What if somebody came to you in '71/'72, and said, "Yes, I had a homosexual encounter, tried it, didn't like it. It was one encounter?" How did that work out?

LEE: That would probably end up being declined. There was a fanaticism within the State Department about homosexual behavior. Admittedly, there were a few cases where Foreign Service employees had been coopted, but those were never really well documented. A lot of this was organizational paranoia. It was unfair that people were treated the way they were treated at that time.

Q: Part of it was because Congress had dumped on the Foreign Service back in the late '40s, early '50s, particularly during the McCarthy period, so that they were trying to prove they were as straight arrow as the military.

LEE: Yes, I think that's very true. If you even get into the '80s, there was a very famous case of a former DCM in our embassy in Vienna who had been accused of passing classified information to the Russians. He lost his position in the Foreign Service. He was not given his retirement. He ended up working in a grocery store. There are two schools of thought. One, the information involved Soviet methods and tactics so well that they never wanted to prosecute the case. But as recently as a few months ago, he was still trying to get his retirement back. Well, if you can't charge somebody and you can't indict them, then the real question is, how do you hold the retirement over their head? Even here, in the '80s and '90s, we're still grappling with these issues. It goes back to the old idea of, if you can't charge me, then let me go and don't violate my rights. So, we've learned a lot, we've gone a long way, but I think we still have a ways to go.

Another issue that was almost unheard of in the '70s and '80s was sexual harassment, which is using one's position to derive sexual favors from another and that clearly has changed the way in which Diplomatic Security today has to grapple with things.

Q: Let's talk a bit about that. A woman who is living with a man. What about a man who is living with a woman? Or a man who is divorced? Or a man who is sleeping around? Or a woman who is sleeping around? How did you deal with this in '71/'72?

LEE: At our level, the agent level, we didn't really deal with it. We had very specific written memos that would tell you what you would do. You would terminate an interview. You would document your report. You would say what somebody had said. You would submit that report to the special agent in charge. He would sign it. It would then be passed on to a senior investigative unit at the Department of State. There would be discussions with the Personnel folks and with the Legal folks and they would make a determination on what the next step was. But clearly, once we terminated an interview and after someone said that they had done something like have an affair, engage in activity that we would almost describe as deviant during that period, there was definite disadvantages and life changing effects by telling somebody that.

Another thing we have not talked about is the unfairness? Let's say, for example, I had a colleague in the Foreign Service who was offered an assignment in Rome. He had married a Polish woman and they denied him from ever being assigned overseas again because he had married a woman from a country that had represented the Soviet Bloc. This was as recent as the mid-'70s. We no longer are in the Cold War, but the issue today is, are we giving away the farm? We now have no restrictions. You can very easily marry a Colombian and be assigned to Colombia, where the family of that Colombian could very well be coopted by drug traffickers or other kinds of potential threats. The whole issue of employee integrity, the investigation of their background, their potentiality for assignments, sexual harassment, what is a spy? We don't even know what a spy is anymore. American companies are merging with foreign companies. There no longer is a difference between a U.S. company and a foreign company. When it comes to things like economic espionage, how do you figure it out?

Q: Were women treated differently in judgment during this '71-'72 period?

LEE: I would say that from an investigative standpoint for suitability for employment, women basically went through hell. First of all, they had little rights. Forget the issues of promotion and pay compatibility and things like that. Many women were not college educated. If they wanted to go beyond a secretary, it was a hard process to go through. They were asked tougher questions in interviews than were men. Emphasis was put on issues like promiscuity. It would probably be okay for a man but not okay for a woman. If a woman were living with another woman, maybe the suspicion was, well, they must be lesbians. In the '90s today, you often will have two, three, four women living together. It's often because of economics. How does a GS or a secretary working at the State Department make ends meet? They make ends meet by living with other people. And yet in the '60s and '70s, we didn't understand that. People lived at home. They lived at home longer. Or they got married young and had a number of children. Women at that point were not independent and they were not encouraged to be independent. It was very tough for them.

Q: In '72, where did you go?

LEE: In 1972, I was assigned out of the field office and given the responsibility of becoming a training officer for people that were being assigned overseas, special agents that would now become regional security officers [RSOs]. I had no experience in being an RSO. I had never been an RSO. But I did have good communication skills. People learned that I did have a good ability to communicate my thoughts verbally and in writing. So, I was told, "Go ahead and put together a training program for RSOs even though you've never been one and set up a training program." Between '72 and '74, that's what I did. It was an office called the Office of Education and Training, which fell under the Operations component of the old office of Security. Our position was to conduct briefings for Foreign Service employees on how to handle classified, the security program that existed at that time, and we developed a program for RSOs because about 1973 after the murder of two of our diplomats in the Sudan, in Khartoum, there was an awful lot of money appropriated to renovate the security program at the State Department. We knew that we would have to be hiring and training a good number of RSOs to be assigned abroad.

Q: What was your feeling about where the Security Office fit in the pecking order within the State Department?

LEE: That's a very good question and it's probably a good question even today. In '72-'74, it was located in the old Office of Administration. The belief was that a lot of administrative functions were support functions. They still are support functions. Security is no different than travel, transportation, budget and finance. It's an administrative function that ought to be under one umbrella. So that's where it was. A lot of people within the Office of Security at that time had an identity crisis. They believed that, if we're going to make a difference, we have to be up near the top, we have to have daily access to the Secretary of State. That was really a fantasy in the minds of a lot of people. The Secretary of State is a political functionary of the White House and the President. The Secretary of State doesn't need to be bothered on support issues that happen day to day.

Q: Certain with Henry Kissinger, he wasn't-

LEE: He was never around. But something we'll talk about later is the continuing identity crisis of the Security Office at the State Department. It worked. It worked okay. Even as we began to build up and assign RSOs around the world? In the '60s, there were only 20-30 RSOs assigned abroad. Today, in 1999, there are probably 4-500. So, things have changed dramatically. We literally have gone from the dinosaur to computer games in a short period of time.

Q: The RSOs that were going out, the 20 more or less, what were their primary functions?

LEE: At that time, they were counterintelligence, increasingly to protect our buildings, our chanceries. As we began to sustain greater acts of violence, terrorism, against diplomats, there came to be personal security issues. But largely protecting classified, conducting investigations, dealing with the threat of the Soviet Bloc. We spent a lot of time looking at suitability of foreign spouses. That was a very big part of our investigative program. It was big in the sense that there were more stumbling blocks for foreign spouses than there were for native born spouses because of the Cold War. At that time, we were not involved in the wide dimension of activities that RSOs are involved in today.

Q: I would have thought that counterintelligence would be quite different than the normal work. Counterintelligence would be almost a function of the CIA. It seems to be a far more difficult thing to develop. For somebody who is busy worrying about physical security and background checks and all, they just wouldn't have the time or the weapons and knowledge to deal with that.

LEE: It's a complex statement that you've raised. If you look at the people that went into the Office of Security in the late '60s/early '70s, these were problem solvers. These were people that had college degrees, they wanted to be in the Foreign Service, they wanted to go abroad, they could think on their feet, they were "men of action," they liked to work. People of that era were products of people that lived through the Depression. It wasn't so much having the ideal job but having any job. If you had a job, you really put all of your energies into it and you worked hard. There were a few policies, a few procedures. There was good orientation in terms of what they wanted you to do. What they really wanted you to do was to make sure that we don't end up with spies inside of our chanceries, that we didn't lose classified documents, and they didn't want anything bad to happen to people that were assigned at our posts. My first post was Cyprus at a time when they were trying to burn our building down literally every day. That was definitely almost a military kind of position. We were throwing tear gas every day and dealing with people breaking into the building. A fascinating assignment. But getting back to your original question, we made the time to do all the things that we were being asked to do. Somehow it got done. There was not a lot of bureaucracy in the State Department at that time. The tasks that you had or the tasks that you gave yourself were easy to attain because you weren't writing reports, you weren't dealing with different layers of bureaucracy, you didn't have people in Washington second guessing your every move, you did not have a highly influential media at that time, you didn't have a lot of problems we have today. So, accomplishing the job whether you were a consular officer or a political officer or a security officer was a lot simpler.

Q: It seems that at that time our security apparatus was focused on subversive influence. Do you have relatives in the Communist Bloc? Did you belong to this or that? In many ways, they were really going after people in their 30s who were more ideologically motivated. At a later point, money was the thing that? For most of our spies today who had been spying for some time maybe, it was money. That's a completely different thing to look at than looking for background and finding out are they ideologically bent towards communism.

LEE: The ideological fanaticism that we had in the '30s continued right up until the '70s. The belief was that if you had the ideology threat of the '30s, you then move up to the next step, the Cold War. You basically have the same threat, just different forms. So, we were asking our security officers to do everything possible to prevent somebody from getting into the system that might be questionable.

Going back to the issue of should the CIA have been doing things that we were doing? The CIA and other intelligence groups collect intelligence. Counterintelligence is really to defend yourself against intelligence methods and operations. What we were doing from an investigative standpoint was really to try to keep the spies and the ideological defects out through the investigative process. By and large, that was successful. It would be very hard in the early '70s for a person who intended to do damage against the U.S. from an intelligence standpoint to circumvent that process. If you look at the '80s and '90s, there really have been very few spies. If you look at the fact that the CIA to this day conducts polygraph examinations for everyone, they've never found a spy using a polygraph. The spies have turned up through other means. So, we were fanatical about keeping the red threat at bay. We did spend a lot of time on that. In the '70s, of course, any RSO that was assigned abroad, his primary job was to deal with those counterintelligence issues.

Q: What about wondering where money came from? Were you alerted to that or was it more on ideology? Somebody getting fancy cars on a junior officer's salary or something like that.

LEE: That was never looked at very methodically. When I became director of security at AID, we had a case where a budget analyst had a \$385,000 house on a GS-11 salary. At the time that I became director at AID, there was no procedure on doing background checks on AID employees. All they would do is what was known as a national agency check, which means you run their name through all of the intelligence agencies and then you stamp the investigation as "done." Because of my experience at State, I reinstituted the reinvestigation process at AID and somebody actually went out to this guy's house to do a neighborhood check and talked to his neighbors. They figured, well, how does he live in almost a \$400,000 house on a \$35,000 salary? It became clear the money was coming from someplace else, which was embezzlement in that case. But you could make that same argument from an intelligence standpoint. But we never looked at the money very methodically. It was more what people told us. We were very unsophisticated. We simply would ask a question and get an answer and write it down and send that to somebody else. Then they would analyze it or evaluate it and then it would go into a different part of the system.

Q: Was there much information or clues coming in from coworkers?

LEE: Rarely. The only time that we would get a lead that might direct us in an area of investigating someone would be a reinvestigation. We used the term in the investigative process of "developed source." That's basically somebody you get the name of that the employee has not given you, so when you reinvestigate someone every five years, you may be given references on their application, they may know who their neighbors are and that kind of thing, but you really want to ask people about other people that might know them, and talk to those people. Quite often, those people end up being people that maybe they didn't have a good relationship with. Quite often, there was character assassination that often was unsubstantiated. Sometimes information would come from a third agency where an individual would say, "Well, I saw So and So talking to someone who was speaking Russian" and that would pop up a red flag and we would then investigate that person to find out were they, in fact, working with the Russians? Was there anything to the allegation? But there was a lot of unfairness during that period insofar as developed sources were concerned.

Q: Were security officers able to sort out pretty well the wheat from the chaffe or character assassination from the real thing? There are people that just don't like people.

LEE: The problem was where the special agent had come from. Because of my background, I probably did what I shouldn't have done if you look at the procedures. I would make judgments, assessments. Basically, you were told, "Ask the question, write down the answer, and report it. Don't interpret it. Don't try to reconcile it. The reconciliation will be done by somebody else." You ended up with this massive amount of paper, most of which might be innuendo, character assassination, information misinterpreted, misreported, misdescribed, and then the snowball begins to run. I probably was different than my colleagues in that I was doing some of the analysis at the first level.

Q: You really need to. You're the only one that has a sense of smell.

LEE: Yes. For example, I once interviewed a woman, a Foreign Service candidate. I asked her whether she had ever used marijuana. She said, "Yes." She was reluctant and there might have been some guilt there. I knew that this was a good person. I knew that she had admitted using marijuana. It turned out to be like a year before that. In my view, that was not current. If I had reported it "current user" or "recent user" - that word "recent" is very important then that could have resulted in her being refused employment. But if I really followed my instinct, this is not a "doper," this is not a regular pot user. This person looked good, was well articulated, was not blurry eyed, did not even fill the description of somebody that's a regular drug user, then I would make up my own interpretation. If I reported it the way it came out, it would be misinterpreted.

Q: I think we might stop at this point.

Today is June 28, 1999. We're up to Cyprus in 1974. How did you get that assignment? What did you expect?

LEE: That assignment was very interesting and in retrospect of all the posts that I had, Cyprus was probably the most interesting. At the time that I was being assigned to Cyprus, just a few months earlier, the Turks had invaded Cyprus in July of 1974 when a Greek-backed coup conspiracy failed, and the Turks decided to invade Cyprus for the idea of partitioning one third of the island for the Turkish Cypriot community. The coup took place in July of 1974. A month later, Cyprus itself was still in political turmoil. Our ambassador in Nicosia was killed during a very extensive small arms attack against the embassy. Ambassador Davies was killed alongside a Foreign Service national employee. That was a political tragedy in many respects. One has to look at Cyprus the way it was then. The government was in disarray. There was the left against the right. People who were for Makarios, the president, who was also the archbishop? The politics of Cyprus despite its small size is very complicated. The long and the short of it was that after Ambassador Davies was killed, we began to realize that this really was a very difficult situation not only for the U.S. but for the United Nations, which had a peacekeeping force there since 1960. The embassy had been pared down because of constant violent riots. The embassy had been broken into by protestors. The post at that time before I got there had burned most of its classified holdings because of having to evacuate people and go through various emergency situations. So, in March of 1975, at that time, I was working in the training office of the Office of Security, now called the Diplomatic Security Service. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time. Because of my military experience, I filled the good bill to be the person to go to Cyprus because the embassy had been under a lot of physical attacks. Two, I was available. So, I was sort of conscripted to go to Cyprus, which was rather interesting. I had never been an RSO before and we had very little training at the time. What skills I did have from my military experience actually served me quite well. When I arrived in Cyprus, the only thing that I found in the large file safe that was in my office was a tennis racket left for me by the previous RSO who I was overlapping with. At that time, the ambassador, William Crawford, was the chief of mission. Because of the threats against Davies, we had a very massive security detail on Ambassador Crawford. In the time that I was there, that level of effort worked quite well. We were able to either neutralize any threats that occurred or prevent them from happening.

Q: You were there from '75 to when?

LEE: From March of '75 to October of 1977.

Q: When you arrived there, what was the morale of the embassy? What did it consist of?

LEE: The embassy was very small. We had a Marine security guard detachment of 13, which was large for most detachments. The combined staff of the embassy other than the Marines was about 20 employees and then some families, although many families had been evacuated and chose not to return. The post was very small, but at that time, it had enormous political significance because of the coup, because of the Turkish invasion. As a side note, it was interesting that in 1995, I was asked by the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs to conduct an investigation in Cyprus in an attempt to find out what happened to a number of Americans who disappeared during the Turkish invasion. I was able to relive my previous Cyprus incarnation in looking at that issue. Lo and behold, we did find remains. The investigation was pressured by the Greek lobby in the U.S. Their thought was that we would find out that many of these Americans had been taken to Turkey, which was not the case at all. This young boy, Andrew Kasakis, had been murdered during the invasion and put in a shallow grave. I was very lucky in being able to cultivate the right sources to find out where his body actually was. Even today in 1999, the Cyprus issue is still very much unsettled. The island is still partitioned. Tensions are just as great as they ever had been.

Q: And we have a very large Greek lobby that wants us to do something, which is essentially get the Turks out.

LEE: Exactly.

Q: When you got there, Bill Crawford had been there for a while. How did he operate?

LEE: Bill Crawford was an interesting person. He was intelligent. He was very skilled in the ways of the Middle East and even though our embassy in Cyprus is sort of handled under the European Bureau, it's really a Middle Eastern country. Bill Crawford had been the DCM in Lebanon prior to that. He had been serving in the Middle East a great deal. He knew the Middle East well. He was an interesting man from the standpoint that it was a small post, he was somewhat of a micromanager. He was driven by the need to control things. I say that as an observation, not necessarily as a criticism. He was respected by a lot of his contacts and counterparts in the Cypriot government, also in the Turkish Cypriot community. He often traveled to the Turkish sector on weekends and that kind of thing mainly to sort of relax because of the threat that confronted him in the Greek sector. He found his assignment there frustrating, as has every other chief of mission who has been there since. No American diplomat at the chief of mission level has ever been able to really budge either the Turks or the Greeks on either side.

Q: What were you told about the security situation when you got there? How did you deal with it? Did it change?

LEE: The previous RSO because of the attack on Ambassador Davies had put into place a good number of additional defenses. When the embassy was broken into about the time the coup took place, they got into the building. They destroyed a lot of things. My job when I went out there, I was basically told, "Keep the ambassador alive. Keep as little classified as possible. Prevent anybody from getting into the embassy." During that period of time, I developed a reputation as being a very innovative person from the standpoint of making sure those things didn't happen. I'll give you a good example. The embassy was in an old apartment building. It was a terrible looking building, all concrete, colored in a golden color. It had a fenced perimeter that was not terribly high. So, the first thing I did, I basically ordered up tens of thousands of dollars of concertina wire. It looked terrible, but it did prevent people from getting into the compound, which would have given them access to the building. The time that I was there, most of '75 and most of '76, we had violent demonstrations at the embassy probably every week. At no time did we ever let anybody into the building. However, there was one case where on a number of demonstrations, people would throw rugs over the concertina, get on the top of a car and then come over the fence that way. They loved to be able to pull the American flag down and burn it. We were going through a lot of flags. I looked at that flagpole and said, "You know, there's got to be something here that we can do to prevent the flags from being burned." It's sort of interesting that, here we are in 1999, I'm talking about 1974, and we have the U.S. Congress looking at legislation to outlaw and ban the burning of American flags. Overseas, it's sort of a symbolic thing that extremist groups do to vent their criticism or their feelings toward the U.S. But getting back to the flagpole, I've always been a person that looks at a situation and tries to analyze what needs to be done and figures out a plan on how to carry it out. It was a very high flagpole, at least 60 feet. What often would happen, protestors would get into the compound and would literally shimmy up the flagpole until they could reach the flag even after we had somehow pulled the lanyard away from the flagpole and secured it to the top of the building. We had one particularly violent demonstration one day. Usually when we had these really violent demonstrations, we knew about it through intelligence and we would send most staff home. The Marine guards and I and other components of the security apparatus would be there. Earlier that week, I had gotten somebody from General Services in the Administrative Section to get a very tall ladder and to go up toward the top of the flagpole and put grease completely on the flagpole so if someone was successful in getting up the flagpole, once they got to the top, they would reach this grease and slide down. I figured that was going to prevent our losing one more flag. Then at one point we had a very violent demonstration. There was an awful lot of teargas that had been dispensed. The Cypriot police at that time did not have a supply of teargas, so we had an enormous supply. We were having support flights from the military coming in sometimes every two weeks bringing in large quantities of teargas. During some demonstrations, we would dispense two or three hundred canisters, which is an awful lot. I was on the roof with a protective vest on. I remember it like it was yesterday. A couple of demonstrators had gotten over the fence despite the barbed wire. I saw this guy begin to short of shimmy up the flagpole. This guy was very good. He kept getting father and farther and farther. He got to where the grease was and it was not working. There was not enough there to actually enable him to slide. I said to myself, "He's going to actually get that flag." I was on the roof and I had a shotgun in my hand, but I had the adaptor for a teargas canister. You put the adapter on the end of a barrel and then you push a canister into this apparatus. I figured, well, if I were to shoot this at him, I wouldn't hurt or kill him, but it's definitely going to disrupt him from his plan to get the U.S. flag. So, I put a canister in the adapter and aimed and shot. It hit him right in the back and it really did jolt him to the point that he literally slid down the whole pole. We took a little bit of criticism in the local press, which was always very anti-U.S. Somebody had made a statement later that "At least they didn't get the American flag." It was an interesting vignette during a period of a lot of political unrest.

Q: Who was demonstrating against us?

LEE: There was a leftist leader named Lesarides who actually in 1999 is still in the House of Representatives in the Republic of Cyprus. He has become less radical, less militant. Essentially, you had a couple of groups that were against the U.S. One was the left, which represented Lesarides. Then you had the right, which represented EOKA-B, which was a radical violent element that really endeavored over the early years of independence to oust the Turks, deny them as much as they could be from the standpoint of social welfare-

Q: They were behind the coup, weren't they?

LEE: EOKA-B was behind-

Q: Samson and all that.

LEE: Samson was connected to Lesarides. Just in the course of a couple of months, you had a couple of different governments. Henry Kissinger in a way regretted that he hadn't focused on Cyprus more directly than he had. If he had done that, things might have turned out much differently. But in essence, the protestors were literally anyone that had an ax to grind against the U.S., including law abiding Cypriots. They pretty much believed what they were being told by the government and what they were being told by the government had a couple of different spins on it. We were very fortunate in that the embassy had extremely good relations with the Canadian police unit of the United Nations. During many severe protests, the UN came to our assistance. They would bring in their APCs and would help us out quite a bit. We owed a lot to the Canadians in particular and also the Swiss and others. Many of the demonstrations were very violent. They never got into the building again, but there were people hurt. There was an awful lot of teargas that was dispersed. Sometimes we had a hard time working with the Cypriot police because they were still citizens of Cyprus. To give you an example of just how deep many of these feelings went, I had a very good police contact who was a chief superintendent, which if you look at the British police system, on which the Cypriot police system is modeled, is pretty much that kind of system. This guy was a chief superintendent. He probably was the fourth or fifth most senior police official in the Cyprus police force. This was a guy that I had had in my home. I had been to his home for dinner. Despite that friendship, whenever he got an opportunity, he would tell me that after the Turks had bombed and attacked the island in July of '74, he recalls walking into fields and seeing "USA" on various shell casings, suggesting that all these bad things happened to Cyprus because the U.S. had sold military equipment and accessories to Turkey, which at that time was affiliated with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and a big U.S. ally from the standpoint of the Cold War. So, the feelings did run very deep. Cypriots generally are very ethnocentric. They're very harsh on the U.S. generally. Many Cypriots that were also U.S. citizens were some of the most critical. Many of them would go to the States or if they were born in the States, they would return to Cyprus. On one hand, they would wrap themselves in the flag because they're different than their Cypriot counterparts. On the other, they were very critical of the United States. That whole period was very difficult politically and just historically. Here we are in 1999 and we still have no solution to the Cyprus problem.

Q: Were we ever considering pulling out of Cyprus during this time?

LEE: We never did. We evacuated our post a couple of times. Many people were evacuated to Athens. Many were evacuated to Beirut. After the Beirut hostilities began in '75 and Beirut was no longer an evacuation safe haven, it was surprising that both and I think you'd have to look at U.S. foreign policy from the standpoint of closing posts we never left when we had problems in Beirut. We never closed our embassy in Cyprus. Here we are in 1999 and we're closing posts every time somebody rattles a saber. In many respects, just in the last week, we have closed temporarily a number of our embassies in Africa. Independently, I would say it's a capitulation to terrorists. If you're closing the door and shutting down business because of the threat of terrorism, the threat of terrorism is always going to be there and there has to be a price for citizenship.

Q: Particularly in a situation such as Cyprus, where it really wasn't the individual terrorists, but it was government policy or the government was doing anything about it to allow this to happen. We had things to give to the Cypriots, including visas and support, and just to shut it down would have sent a very strong message that, "You're on your own."

LEE: Right. The embassy on balance did a very good job from the standpoint of American services and consular support during a very difficult situation. You had people in the embassy, political officers, the consul, a number of other people that were literally going all over the island while this was happening, ferreting out Americans that needed to be either evacuated or provided information or consular services. From that standpoint, the post did very well. On the other hand, we literally were under siege most of the time. We were asking for the UN's help a good bit of the time. It was a very high threat environment for a number of years.

Q: You are the security officer. One can concentrate on the ambassador and concentrate on the defense of the embassy, but you've got people, consular officers, political officers, and also going out and doing their business. How did one protect them?

LEE: We were very lucky. That's the short answer. Cypriots by nature are not the kind of people that would hurt someone else. They're a very peace-loving people and yet very emotional. The violence that we have seen in Cyprus during that period, apart from the murder of Ambassador Davies, was more the building, the embassy, it being a symbolic target. Apart from the ambassador, we never really had any personal security concerns. Traditionally, Cyprus has always been a very safe country. I left my wallet in my car one day. It was parked in the driveway of my home. I left it on the seat. It had \$100-150 in it. It was completely fine. Robbery and theft and that kind of thing is something the Cypriots don't do. They do get violent. They do vent their emotional frustration when it comes to political issues. That would apply even to this day.

Q: It's practice that the government of Cyprus and this stands for the Greek side because our embassy is on the Greek side is responsible for the security of the embassy. You weren't getting it. I would think there would be a point where we would be talking to the Greek Cypriots and saying, "If you can't do this, say so and that's it. We'll either leave or take our own measures."

LEE: I guess Henry Kissinger and Ambassador Bill Crawford had made a decision that no matter what, we weren't going to pull out. I know that Crawford had gone to the Cypriots on a number of occasions requesting a more diligent level of protection when we got these demonstrations. I think to a degree, the Cypriot government was cosponsoring a program of "We're going to let these demonstrations totally disrupt the function of the embassy, but we aren't going to let them get into the building again." The police really did very little when we had these demonstrations. They would dispense the teargas for us. We would throw the teargas from the roof. We did keep people out. I found it as an RSO phenomenal that we would continue to hunker down and experience all of this chaos. We were fortunate that we had the UN. They literally saved us from serious problems a number of times. To this day, I really question whether we did the right thing politically. I think probably if most consular services had been fulfilled and they were fulfilled in July and August of '74 closure of the embassy or pulling the ambassador or doing other things might have been things that we could have done to get the message across to Republic of Cyprus.

Q: How did you protect the ambassador?

LEE: Ambassador Crawford would go to the Turkish sector just about every weekend. When he was in the Greek sector, he would be in a limousine, ballistic resistant, protected. We would have a lead car and a follow car. We would do an advance. It was almost as if he were a head of state. He really had an extremely high level of personal safety. The emphasis on that was because, after Ambassador Davies' murder, Henry Kissinger made it very clear to all concerned that we couldn't run the risk of losing another ambassador in Cyprus for all kinds of reasons apart from a moral obligation to people in the Foreign Service. We were very lucky in that we didn't have any future incidents. Crawford was a difficult person to work with in a lot of different ways. He drank a good bit. He had a lot of experience. He was not terribly supportive of the security function, something that RSOs have to deal with. There are other idiosyncrasies that ambassadors have. Some are very good. Some are very supportive. Some are not. The very fact that in the early to mid-'80s, there was a total review of the way in which security service was provided to embassies suggests that many chiefs of missions were not being fully supportive. Quite often, money that had been appropriated for security programs were used for other things. What we saw in the mid-late '80s was a program that we were going to make chief of missions legally responsible for the welfare and safety of their posts, that if there was a serious incident, it would be investigated by a board of inquiry. This was an infrastructure we had not had before. In many respects, we learned a lot during that period. On the other hand, there were a lot of things that were done in this new effort that really were impractical. There was a lot of money wasted. Here we are in 1999. We've had two other embassies blown up in Kenya and in Tanzania and we're sort of doing the same thing all over again. We're going to spend a lot of money, but on balance, we aren't really going to protect people any better.

Q: What about homes?

LEE: The housing that we had in Cyprus was excellent. Even to this day, it's a post where Foreign Service people live a very nice life. Most live in single family homes. They're very spacious, very large. We never had a problem with residential security, although I'd like to share with you a couple of interesting cases. It would have been in October of '75 that because of the threats against official Americans in Cyprus, we were constantly telling people to be very careful of pipe bombs. There had been a history of them being used in Cyprus. Because of the anti-U.S. feelings, we said to people usually every couple of weeks, "Look at your car. Is there anything strange? Look underneath it. Is anything hanging off?" We really were very successful in getting people to take that seriously. One morning, I was having a piece of toast and a cup of coffee in my house. I went outside and sort of bent down and looked under the car. I had an old Austin Healy sports car. It had a back seat that we used for our two children, who were very young at the time. I looked under the car and lo and behold there was a pipe bomb affixed to the exhaust pipe. I said, "Wow, that's pretty incredible." If I had gotten in the car and driven, because there was a mercury switch attached to the pipe bomb, it would have detonated. I was in a unique situation in that the CIA did not have official representation in Cyprus at the time, so I was the bag man for the intelligence community. When people looked at who was the intelligence representative in Cyprus, it was me. So, I came under some different kind of threats than at a normal post. In most places, intelligence representatives are declared to the host government. In this case, that was not the case. I called the police. They came. The bomb disposal group rendered the bomb safe and I took the morning off.

There was another thing that happened that was fascinating. Cyprus at the time was a haven for a lot of Europeans, particularly from Eastern Europe, either coming for vacation or cultural performances and things like that. There was a group of Czech musicians that had come to do a performance at the national theater. This was in 1975/'76. The Cold War between the East and the West was doing quite well from a conflict standpoint. What often would happen, Eastern Europeans would come to Cyprus and then defect. Either they would be handled as legitimate intelligence defectors or they would be turned over to the UN High Commission for Refugee Affairs and eventually funneled into another country like Canada, Australia, or what have you. We got a defector who came into the embassy. He was Czech. He was a musician. Because of the policies and procedures we had at the time, we sort of put him on ice in the embassy for a number of hours. Then because of my perception by some people of being the intelligence representative, we got him into a hotel and we had a couple of people keep an eye on him. We eventually turned him over to the UN. They got him to Athens. But two days after we had him processed and he left, I went home for lunch. We had a young woman that was sort of our cook and nanny for our two children before they went to school. I went in the back door from the back of the house, where the garage was, and I saw a coin laying right there by the door. It looked like a penny. I picked it up and looked at it and I realized, "This is not a penny at all. It's a Czech coin." I think it was probably a very subtle message to me that the Czech embassy was keeping a very close eye on me. As a result of that coin being left, we had security technicians come in and check the house to make sure that nothing had been left behind, like a listening device. For about two months, there would be another coin just simply as a reminder. But those were a couple of interesting?

Q: How about access to the embassy? I imagine there would have been a lot of Cypriots who wanted to go to the United States. There is a large Greek Cypriot community in the U.S. How did that work?

LEE: By the time that I got there, March/April of '75, most of the Greek Cypriots that were intending to leave either temporarily or permanently had already been processed. Many of them, particularly the wealthy Cypriots, and most Cypriots are wealthy, probably wealthier than many Americans, considering the fact that it's an island, just about everybody owns property and that property is worth an awful lot of money, most Cypriots that were at that point not wanting to leave or trying to leave remained with the idea that either the United States or someone would come in, make this whole thing go away, the Turks would be ousted, and they would have their island back. The big influx in terms of the Consular Section was really from the Lebanese. We had on an average day beginning probably in mid to late '75/'76, we'd get 20-30 Lebanese a day that had left Beirut because of the increasing hostilities and now had taken up temporary residence in Cyprus and now either wanted to go to the States or to apply for something, either claiming a U.S. connection for a passport or visa or what have you. So, we had a lot of Lebanese coming in. At that time and even to this day, Cyprus is a big transient point for extremists, particularly Palestinian terrorists, things like that. We had a guy come in with a briefcase full of money. I think he had paid for a consular service with some of this U.S. currency. I had given the entire Consular Staff a briefing on counterfeit currency sometime prior to that. The guy was still there. He was waiting for processing. The consular assistant called me and said she had a very suspicious bill. I went down and spoke to her. It was very counterfeit, there was no question about it. This guy had a whole briefcase full of it. I approached him and said I needed to talk to him. I took him into another office. I said, "I'm going to confiscate all of your money." I think he had gotten it in Beirut with the idea of passing it on to another party for an exchange of money. We then processed that money. It was about \$400,000. We sent it up to the Secret Service in Paris. That was a feather in my cap in terms of taking a lot of counterfeit money off the market. Unfortunately, this guy was not happy about this at all. He almost became violent. We simply said, "You can leave the embassy. The consular function is fine, but we're not going to let you walk out the door with all this money." He began to shout and scream and finally went away.

Q: What about travel to the Turkish side? Did you work on security arrangements with the Turks?

LEE: Not much. That's a very good question. Ambassador Crawford and I disagreed on a lot of things. One of them was the fact that when he went to the Turkish side, he would have no security at all. I made the point to him that if there was a threat on the Greek side, there was a threat on the Turkish side. His position was that there was no threat on the Turkish side, the Turkish Cypriots were probably more benevolent toward the U.S. at that standpoint than were the Greek Cypriots. At least the Turkish Cypriots weren't anti-U.S., whereas the Greek Cypriots were. Invariably, this monstrous detail that we had on the Greek side would escort him to the Green Line and then he would get into an unprotected sedan, an Audi, and then he would be on his own when he was in the Turkish sector. People that had an official passport or a diplomatic passport that were assigned to the embassy could go to the Turkish sector at any time. People actually enjoyed going over there. It was a much calmer environment. There was less worry about anti-Americanism and that kind of thing. It was really quite comfortable. The embassy at that time had an embassy house on the northern coast near Kyrenia, a very picturesque harbor area. Many people did go over there on the weekends simply to sort of unwind and relax.

There was a bit of a scandal that unfolded during the time I was there. When the Turks came and you have to remember that there really were two periods where the Turks came into Cyprus one was in July and one was in August the second time, the Greek Cypriots realized that these guys were really serious. The first coup was really more just on the coast. The second coup, which took place in August, they literally went into villages? They were very close to Nicosia. Because of the religious foundation of Greek Cypriots, they would have a lot of nice things in their homes. Historically, some of the most valuable icons on the Greek Orthodox side have come from Cyprus. There was an awful lot of looting of homes that had been abandoned, Greek Cypriots that left their homes in Morphou or the port area of Famagusta, Kyrenia, other places within the north and they left to go to be with family in the south. There were regular allegations that many of the UN, other diplomats, had gone into homes and- (end of tape)

By the time I got there, a lot of this had been over, but you would constantly hear reports at dinner parties and receptions and that kind of thing that this official or that official or this diplomat or that diplomat had some very expensive and priceless icons that they had taken from Greek homes. We had probably bigger fish to fry. If our level of sophistication of misconduct at that time was as good as it is now, we would have gone after some of these people. But the government was still in disarray. A lot of people just simply didn't care. I can imagine that if I was a Greek Cypriot and I had had to abandon my home and someone had come in and someone had taken all my stuff, I'd be pretty angry.

Q: What about the care and feeding of the Marine Corps detachment?

LEE: We had a good Marine security guard detachment. They were very energetic, very responsive. We had drills all the time for attacks on the embassy and that kind of thing. They were a very integral part of the embassy community. The Marines and the rest of the post socialized a great deal. The Marine house was a place where most people gravitated to on the weekends, where movies were shown. At that particular juncture, people didn't have video recorders and many of them did not have televisions that would provide any kind of videotapes. So, people did watch movies at the Marine house. That was a social center. But the Marines did extremely well, particularly under duress. In a lot of these demonstrations, they showed considerable restraint in not discharging their weapons. We were very lucky.

Q: With any Marine Corps detachment, these are usually unmarried young men and sex becomes a normal problem. But when you have a strong leftist and a strong rightist movement who are trying to do all sorts of things, I would think that this would be a particular problem for you for trying to keep them from getting either coopted or in dangerous situations.

LEE: We never had a problem with that, surprisingly. The left or the right never took advantage of the Marines. At that time, the Soviet presence was very keen. The soviets were using a lot of travel agencies in Cyprus as front organizations. But the Marines, there were clubs, discotheques, available. A number of Marines that were posted in Cyprus at that time married Greek Cypriot young women. Of course, there are all kinds of old protocols in terms of the way in which that works from the standpoint of the ceremony and the engagement. An engagement usually brings with it sleeping privileges. Families take these things very seriously. There had been one case where a Marine had reneged on an engagement and that caused a lot of consternation from a social standpoint. But by and large, we had a great Marine detachment. There wasn't any co-opting that we were aware of. Because the post was so small, there was a lot of good dialogue between the entire post and so the Marines were never sort of put out on a shelf and left to their own devices. They were involved. They were invited to people's homes. They were almost like other parts of the family.

Q: Did you usually have warnings of these demonstrations?

LEE: One problem we had, there was a large technical school two blocks from the embassy. The leftist elements within the country used this technical school as their cannon fodder. We would get wind of the fact that - we had some people in the police that were constantly patrolling the city and whenever they would see young boys, 12-14, with a lot of bottles and they were buying gas in local gas stations, we knew that a demonstration was about to hit. They would make up all these Molotov's. They would make them up in cases and throw them at the building. But quite often, we had good intelligence connections. On a personal level, the person in charge of the Central Information Service, the Cypriot intelligence service. They gave us a lot of information, were very good at it. Occasionally, there would be a demonstration that would get cooked up very quickly and you could hear it for probably blocks. Quite often, there would be as many as 5-10,000. They literally swarmed around the outer perimeter of the embassy. You'd think that everybody in the country was participating. They really took their politics very seriously and very emotionally.

Q: By the time you left there in October of '77, how were things going? Did you see a change?

LEE: Going much better. The demonstrations had pretty much ended. Many of the Cypriots at that time were reconciling themselves to the fact that there is not going to be an immediate solution, they aren't going to be going back to their homes. Crime was never a problem. We were beginning to develop a normality within the post. We were keeping records, documents. It was beginning to function like a regular post. Nevertheless, we did have threats. One interesting thing that I did work on when I was there was the investigation of the murder of Jack Welch, who had been the station chief of the CIA in Athens. It was believed that there was an EOKA-B connection to that murder. We worked on that for a good bit of the time that I was there, never developed any evidence to that effect. Of course, the November 17th group was blamed for that killing and no one has ever been arrested in conjunction with that murder.

Q: In fact, there have been several other murders, too, of which the November 17th group has been linked.

LEE: Yes.

Getting back to your question, the post was becoming very normal. People were doing things that they weren't doing before. Threats, demonstrations, had ended. At that point, I almost got bored some days. I wasn't constantly gearing up for another demonstration.

Q: Whither in October '77?

LEE: When that came along, I was assigned to be the RSO in Seoul.

Q: How did that come about?

LEE: That came about, I guess, one, I had done a very good job in Cyprus. Seoul was considered to be an excellent assignment for a mid-level officer. The powers that be in Washington had a vacancy coming up and I guess they wanted to reward me with a good assignment and so that's what happened. My wife and my two children and I went on home leave and then we moved on out to Seoul.

Q: I may have had somewhat of a role there. I was consulate general in Seoul at the time. In a '77 consular conference in Bangkok, I talked to Barbara Watson and told her that I thought we may have had a fraud problem there. I just wanted a lot of smoke. Knowing the Korean society, I knew there was probably a good chance. Frankly, I had gotten nowhere with the security officer. There was no feeling of, "Maybe I'll take a look at this." "Well, you show me something and maybe I'll do something." All I could do was say, "We're in a fraudulent system where visas cost? There are people willing to pay a great deal of money for an American visas and it's a society which does not condone the use of fraud." So, I told Barbara Watson and she said she'd see what she could do about it. So, I suspect she put in something saying, "We want to get a more energetic security officer."

LEE: Very interesting. Seoul turned out to be a very diverse assignment. We had just about everything there. We had the Park Kom Song affair.

Q: This was the Koreagate, Ricegate.

LEE: Where the U.S. was accused of bugging the Blue House. The Korean CIA was very involved in actually sponsoring some demonstrations against our embassy there during that period of time.

Q: You were there from when to when?

LEE: '77 to April of '79. I constantly was going from one post to another fixing things. As it turned out, we got heavily involved in visa malfeasance investigations in Taiwan that resulted in the termination of a good number of our Consular Section employees.

Q: I thought this time we might talk about the Seoul time. Let's talk about the thing that I was concerned about: the possibility of visa fraud. We just knew there had to be. But there had never been to my knowledge a real major investigation onto this. I was concerned. How did you look at it? What does one do when one comes into a situation like this?

LEE: I think from the standpoint of visa fraud, you have a couple of different issues. One, you have fraudulent obtaining of visa by fraudulent means, paying money for it, co-opting somebody and otherwise getting a legitimate visa through fraudulent means. Occasionally, there was the obtaining of a fraudulent visa through fraudulent means or through other means. And you had the visa malfeasance, which was really the improper conduct on the part of a consular or other employee. Often, the fraud and malfeasance obviously went together. Because of my investigative background, which I actually had had even before joining the Foreign Service, investigations were something that I enjoyed doing. I viewed these as a bit of a challenge. As we talk more, you'll see that there were a number of different areas that I got very interested in supporting our programs at post from an investigative standpoint. When I was getting ready to go out to Seoul, I was told that the RSO that had been there was just sort of a caretaker.

Q: Yes.

LEE: And that they were looking for someone that really could either resolve if there was a fraud problem or put it to bed one way or the other. So, we began to work closely with the Consular Section in terms of what we did and did not know. We began to look at trends, at brokers, people that really were pushing visas either simply as a scam with legitimate visa seekers or possibly involved in a criminal process of fraud in obtaining a U.S. visa. We began to realize that the system that was in place in the Korean national police was really very inept, very ineffective. Quite often, if somebody needed a "no record" report from the police to submit with their visa application, whether they had a criminal record or not was really immaterial. They would simply pay the right person and get a very pretty, very official looking document that said "no record." So, not only did we have a problem of the visa brokers that were breaking both Korean and U.S. law, but we had police engaging in bribery and document fraud on their own point. We had a lot of Korean employees in the Consular Section that were co-optable from visa brokers and a number of other people. So, we really began to put together a program of conducting investigations, looking at trends, reviewing a number of cases, looking at the people we had working in our consular section. Over the next few years, the efforts that the consul general had begun to germinate proved to be the case. In time, not only were there a number of terminations, but there was also some exposure of what the police were doing and what the visa brokers were doing and that kind of thing. On balance, it was a very effective program of looking at visa fraud and visa malfeasance. It's probably gotten better because of the technology of visas and the way in which they're now issued and handled and accounted for. But during the early '70s, it was very easy to engage in visa fraud and to a degree visa malfeasance because there really more from a policy standpoint, the Office of Security at that time, while they had a legal mandate to investigate passport fraud and malfeasance relating to that, they had not done all that much in the area of visa fraud and visa malfeasance, so we were sort of breaking new ground in developing ways to investigate that.

Q: How did you work in the Consular Section? I left there in '79 about when you did. There had been? A significant number of the Consular Section had been found to be involved, which wasn't really surprising, but it was the first time that anybody had lifted this particular stone up. How did you go out about finding out about malfeasance? What was the technique?

LEE: The best technique was information would come to us. I think we began to put out the word not only to visa applicants, we would do this often through the local guards that were in close proximity to these long visa lines. Both overtly and covertly, we would really put out the word that if you had been paying a lot of money for a visa or you paid somebody to fix a visa, we would very much like to talk to you. It took a number of months, but we did develop a lot of information. People now were beginning to come forward. Koreans themselves tend not to be terribly keen on talking to people. They tend to keep things to themselves. They're somewhat distrustful of authority figures and that kind of thing. But I think we had a lot of good luck. In many respects, people knew that we were getting interested. Probably because the embassy and the State Department up until that time had not done a great deal, a lot of people figured, "Oh, I guess they don't mind operating in this kind of environment." But then when we began to try to let people know that we're investigating this, we want to get the criminals out that are involved whether they're visa brokers or embassy employee people would call us with anonymous information. They would give us the name of the case. Quite often, it would even be one visa broker working against another, thereby trying to get rid of some of the competition. We probably didn't get it all, but we really did make some headway. It was very painstaking work. It was a lot of detailed work. Sometimes, we would, for example, take the names off of a visa application and call and see whether someone even existed. Quite often, we would talk to a person who was on a visa application and they would actually be very useful in providing information that would lead to another case. Visa fraud investigations were probably one of the most complex of any that I've ever worked on. They're very unwieldy. Quite often, you end up with a lot of old or dry leads and they don't go anywhere. You usually need the testimony of someone that can tell you how to really uncover the iceberg.

Q: One of the things I was concerned about was that over the years Americans had been targets of people? People who were shoppers got special deals from shop owners. It's a quid pro quo within about 30 seconds. Also, for the Koreans, unlike almost anywhere else I've been, sex was like small change practically. If they wanted something, they would drag out a younger cousin or something like this and there she would be. So, this was a real concern. I remember pointing you towards the Americans, too. As far as I know, nothing came out of it. But it was a difficult place.

LEE: Yes. The embassy in Seoul at that time was a challenge. The embassy in Bangkok was another one which I later went on to and did a lot of investigation there in the area of visa fraud. The Philippines, of course. At that time, our visa system was very unsophisticated. It was easy to engage in fraud in many respects. No one was looking into it. You're quite right. In many cultures, particularly in Asia, what we view as fraud is not viewed as fraud in their context. It's just simply a minor impediment. It's not murder, so how bad can it be? But the use of money, of dinners, of sex, all those things were used and probably pretty heavily with local staff, their families being coopted and coerced, particularly in Korea, where organized crime has always operated. If you got on the wrong list, you could get into serious trouble. When we talk about Bangkok, I'll tell you a very funny story where a visa broker dropped a whole box of banded crates over my back fence. These were very poisonous snakes. The idea was to send me a message to not pursue these investigations.

Q: In Korea, did you find much interest on the part of the ambassador, DCM, or anyone else?

LEE: Apart from the consul general, yourself, there really was not that much interest. The one thing that the DCM and the ambassador did not like were the long lines. They viewed those as an eyesore. Probably from the standpoint of the ambassador and the DCM, they did have bigger fish to fry. They had major policy issues the Koreagate, the corruption, the human rights abuses, which were a big issue at that time-

Q: And then the minor threat of an all-out war.

LEE: Sure. And of course, during that period of time, it was the Singlaub period, where an army general became very adamant about the threat from North Korea. But I think to really answer your question, there wasn't a lot of pressure for us to do anything. There was pressure from Washington, from Barbara Watson, the Assistant Secretary's office, from the security side in the Department. Fortunately, the consular side and the security side at the post that realized this was a problem and probably in many respects, these folks broke a lot of ground that would help in the future in terms of dealing with visa fraud.

Q: I have to laugh because while we were working on this fraud, a new set of fraud was just beginning, the matter of fake petitions coming in from the United States. That was on somebody else's watch.

LEE: Yes.

Q: What were some of the other things you were having to deal with? You mentioned Park Tong Song. What was that and what was your role in that?

LEE: Park Tong Song was a businessman, a trained businessman. He was accused of selling favors, working both sides of the street between the U.S. and the Korean side. About that time, there were allegations that the U.S. CIA had bugged the equivalent of the White House in Seoul. There were some state sponsored demonstrations against the embassy whereby the government was behind them. They mainly wanted to send a signal to the embassy. In a couple of those cases, demonstrators did get into the building despite our best efforts. We had some rather tense times when those took place. Then we had a number of Justice officials that came out that often were mobbed by protestors and press and that kind of thing.

Q: One was Rudolph Giuliani.

LEE: Yes, exactly.

Q: Now the major of New York.

LEE: Yes. Another facet related to what I did in Korea was work very closely with the military investigative organizations. Quite often, Army or Air Force soldiers would become involved in marriage fraud whereby they would agree to marry a woman with the idea that the marriage would be walked away from the moment that they got to the States and got their visa and passport and what have you. That was another facet that we worked on quite a bit. Again, going after visa brokers and that kind of thing. We had a drug problem to a degree within the U.S. youth community and I worked with the military on that a good deal. Despite the aggressive nature of my work that involved going after the police on the fraudulent police records, before I left, I did get a rather prestigious award from the Korean national police just generally because that's their way of doing things. That was sort of nice.

Crime was relatively low. Korea at that time would best be called a benevolent police state where nothing is going to happen anywhere without the knowledge of the government.

Q: Park Chung Hee was in control. In late '79, he passed from the scene, being killed by the head of the Korean CIA.

LEE: Yes.

Q: But at that time, it was?

LEE: Yes. Seoul was the kind of post that has everything. Any facet of Foreign Service life that can happen happens there. You've got every piece. You have enormous trade, just all kinds of political issues, particularly relating to North Korea. No matter what function you have at the embassy, it's a very broad base of experience that officers develop.

Q: The Koreans were probably one of the most aggressive, although I suppose Japan was just as bad, with bribery in commercial cases, did that impinge at all on you or was that just something that didn't affect the official community?

LEE: It really did not affect us a great deal. What was interesting was that during our assignment in '78, the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act was passed by the U.S. Congress. That really made it much more difficult for U.S. companies to use intermediaries to pay bribes and that kind of thing, probably in competition against foreign companies that are more than willing to do that in many cases. But the bribery aspect of the government never affected us that much. It was more the internal disruptions of the post from the visa standpoint.

Q: Were there any other areas within the embassy that fell in your purview that were concerns?

LEE: One issue that we were always concerned about was protecting classified information. Anyone that ever thought that a North Korean could not function and assimilate in South Korean society would be fooling themselves with the skill levels of fraudulent documents and what have you. We were concerned about intelligence operations against the U.S. We were very concerned about bugging, particularly after the allegation that the U.S. had bugged the Blue House.

Q: How was that settled?

LEE: Basically, time settled it. There was a lot of consternation. The Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, Richard Holbrooke, came out and tried to smooth some ruffled feathers. It was sort of interesting that Richard Holbrooke of late has been very involved in being a negotiator of various political/ethnic strifes in Eastern Europe. He has been the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs for the last couple of years. He's been around over a large period of time. A rather interesting side note: when Holbrooke was getting ready to leave Korea during one of his many visits to Seoul, his first or second visit, the foreign minister was at the planeside waiting for him to come up and shake hands. He walked right by the foreign minister and never said, "Goodbye." I think that no matter what level of government you're in, you have to be very sensitive as to who people are and protocol and cultural nuances, which is something that in the era of the '90s we take for granted.

Q: South Korea during those days was known as one of those places where our CIA had a very strong presence. Did you find yourself tripping over them? How did that work?

LEE: The presence in Seoul at that time was quite large. We did have some rivalries. They did often get in the way. Fortunately, I had a good relationship with the management people there. But they were all over the place. Unfortunately, it became somewhat disruptive for other sections that were having to sort of make concessions for the way in which intelligence operations worked. Some sections weren't nearly as productive because representatives were doing other things.

Q: One of the things that concerned me? In the Consular Section, we were sitting on well over 100,000 visa records, which included personnel backgrounds and all that. I couldn't help feeling that we had not done a good job in June of 1950 when we pulled out of there, that we had an awful lot of information on South Koreans, legitimate information on them, not only there but other places, all of which could have been deadly in the hands of the North Koreans. The common sense was that within three days, the North Koreans could probably take Seoul. Then the hope was that they would suffer a tremendous defeat thereafter. But we were just too close to the border. What about plans for response to a North Korean invasion? That must have been quite a problem for you.

LEE: It was a problem that I worried about a great deal. I knew that we really were not prepared in that regard. Our embassy in Seoul was one of the largest in Asia. You really have to look at the fact that we had this enormous military presence in the country, we had air bases all over the country, we had American military all over. I think there was the belief that the North Koreans would never come south, that the infrastructure of the U.S. military would be so massive that they wouldn't do it. But as we've seen in other countries, things change very quickly. They become very fluid. We have a way politically of underestimating the capability of our adversaries.

Q: We think they'll behave the way we think a rational person would behave.

LEE: Right. Yes.

Q: In our interpretation.

LEE: A good example: we've seen a civil war in Colombia for the last 30 years. For the first time ever, that country is in dire risk of literally coming unglued because of the superiority that the rebel groups now have. We've seen it in other countries. For example, El Salvador in 1989. No one ever thought that a rebel group could take over the city. They did it. I think that in the '90s and as we go into the millennium we need to be a little tougher in making our own political assumptions about these kinds of things. I think you're right, that with all the information that was available in the embassy and various other U.S. offices in Seoul, it was a big risk.

Q: Were you able to deal with this at all?

LEE: No one was really interested, not from Washington, not from the upper levels of the post. Their view was, this is business as usual, this is a very safe country, the military (both U.S. and Korean) are going to solve any problems that happen, so let's not worry about something that's not a problem.

Q: It didn't turn out to be, but that's a cloud that? It's still not settled, but now the preponderance is no longer with the North, but at one point the North had more military clout than the South.

LEE: One thing that always did bother me both in my office and also in the Consular Section was that so much of this information was available to so many people. We really had very few controls on a lot of it. For example, we in our office did an awful lot of investigations of Korean nationals. We had file cabinets upon file cabinets of reports that we had done, sometimes background checks, sometimes for misconduct. It was my belief that the large investigative staff that we had probably used that information to their own benefit. We tend to forget those things. We tend to think about operating within our own system but we don't realize how other systems work. On a humorous note, because I worked with Koreans almost exclusively, or a lot because of the investigations we did, you would go to work in the morning and of course most Koreans would eat kimchi for breakfast. This is a very odorous cabbage? After a while, I finally said, "I think I'm just going to join them." I started eating it as well. It was a very fascinating assignment. There were a lot of interesting things that were happening at that time. The visa fraud?

Another investigative activity that came up which probably people that hear this would find incredible is that towards the end of my assignment, I became heavily involved in investigating diplomats, people assigned to the post, that had profited from the sale of their automobiles.

Q: I got \$50.00 for mine.

LEE: Well, there was a very senior CIA employee who sold his car and apparently declared that he had received \$2,500 for it. We actually got a complaint from someone that also was bidding on the car and said that he had offered \$21,000. That caused us to really begin to look at this very carefully. It turned out that the deal that he accepted was \$26,000. That person lost his job. It was a referral to the Department of Justice. When he left government, he said he was going to go to law school and come back and sue me. I never heard from him again, but there were a number of cases like that that we became involved in. What's interesting is that a couple of years after that, the law changed to the point that you could make a profit on an automobile. So, with the strike of a pen, one day you can do something; the next day you can't.

Q: Did you get involved in the Moon case? This was the Reverend Moon, who had a church, still going. There was a complaint that he had gotten visa by fraud. They even sent out some INS investigators. Did you get involved in that?

LEE: No, we did not. That is surprising because given the level of visibility of him, particularly in the States, and development of his church and the kind of money that was involved, there was a lot of talk, a lot of discussion, but we were never asked to do anything. I don't know whether that was done at a much different level.

Q: The INS sent out some people. I remember getting into some trouble because the Koreans didn't realize they were going to be questioning. As far as I could see, he got his visas through his wife. She claimed to have been a cook. There was no record of the school where she had supposedly been a cook. It was very dubious. I guess it was not proven.

I think this might be a good place to stop this time. Where did you go in 1979?

LEE: Bangkok.

Q: Ed, you want to talk about a fascinating case in Cyprus dealing with homosexuality. When did this come up?

LEE: That was a very interesting case that shows the interesting kinds of challenges that a RSO can have. Midpoint during my career in Nicosia, I got a call one day from the British forces, from Akrotiri, one of two sovereign British bases in Cyprus. This was 1976. They called me and wanted to know whether I was available to talk to them. They said they would come up to see me the following day at the embassy. A group of about four special branch investigators from the British base came up. They wanted to make absolutely sure that our discussion was going to be in the utmost of confidence. I assured them of that. They basically had me get a tape recorder and they put a tape in this recorder and they began to play it. Essentially, it was a series of obscene telephone calls. I recognized the voice. It was the voice of a person assigned to the post at that time. Apparently, what this person was doing was calling British spouses at the sovereign base because he had access to the directory and that kind of thing and was making obscene phone calls. This person was a communicator and was actually making these calls from the CPU unit while he was working. Needless to say, it posed a very interesting challenge for all kinds of reasons legal and humanitarian and everything else. We then began to try to analyze what was happening, developed information to the extent that we could. Eventually, that tape recording was taken back to Washington and there were decisions made on the personal and medical side. The person was transferred from post. This was a timeframe when criminal prosecutions were unlikely or not necessarily emphasized, so the matter was put into the medical personnel area and the person never served abroad again. But it goes to show you how good police contacts and good networking and relationships in a country can be very useful.

Q: One of the things that strikes me when we were particularly concerned about security matters, the people who are sitting on most of the sensitive stuff are the communicators and the communicators have struck me in my time in the Foreign Service as often being a breed apart. They are kind of loners often, not always? Males, unmarried. The type of work does keep them isolated from the community because they don't have regular hours. It's a difficult job but also there almost seems to be a personality type that causes problems. I'm speaking about homosexualitywe're talking about the era when it was susceptible to blackmailpersonality disorders, what have you. Was this a pattern at the time?

LEE: Yes. If you look at the period late '60s to maybe late '80s, at that time, the communications system was much different than it is today. Probably in that era, the process of communicating was more time consuming. It is a very lonely kind of job. As you point out, people often were working odd shifts. This is a personal opinion, but I think people that work with machinery that don't have a lot of contact with others tend to often get into behavioral difficulty. Not to pick on the communicators because they do a wonderful job and we'd be lost without them, but I think there's a built-in risk there for people that often may not be married, that don't have a family setting. Just looking at communicators over my Foreign Service career, there is a big difference between those that had families or significant others and those that did not. Communicators often would frequent local bars a lot more. They often would do things out of the mainstream. I'm making some subjective comments here, but from a security standpoint, there was a different kind of risk for the communicators.

Q: Did you see that being with people who were computer programmers and all that? I can see some of the same things.

LEE: You're quite right. You can just look at the way people communicate in the Foreign Service today. There is probably far less human contact than there used to be. We don't even talk to each other anymore. It's via e-mail or Internet or fax or what have you. People have pagers and they're getting information from all kinds of different ways. But what we're losing in the Foreign Service in a contemporary setting is probably communication. I can't say? I still travel abroad a great deal. I visit posts. I think things are a little different than they were during the '60s, '70s, and '80s. But maybe it was unique to that particular period. Many of the concerns that we had at that time was the Cold War and the potentiality of a communicator being targeted from a hostile intelligence standpoint. So that major concern sort of went away. Nevertheless, we have an awful lot of countries out there that still want our information.

Q: Turning to Bangkok, you were there from '79 to when?

LEE: 1981.

Q: What was your job and what was the situation?

LEE: I was the RSO in Bangkok. A large embassy. Sort of an interesting embassy in that the footings on which the embassy was built back in the '50s was not well settled. Each year, the chancery itself was disappearing by about half an inch. It was beginning to take its toll. Since then, there has been a complete renovation and upgrading. But during that period, that was during the period that the hostages were being held in Iran. The Beirut hostages were beginning to happen a few years after that. Another interesting development at that time was the turbulence in Kampuchea or Cambodia. The refugee problem was enormous, one of the largest refugee exodus in political history. The post was really heavily bogged down in trying to deal with this refugee problem. Of course, the Khmer Rouge were very active in killing people in wholesale fashion.

At the post, we had a number of priorities on the security side. We had drug use by many of our dependents, children of the Foreign Service staff. Another factor was increasing crime. Pollution and traffic and many of the other issues were also a problem. We often had a good number of people that were involved in accidents. A topic near and dear to your heart was visa malfeasance. I had gotten involved in that in Korea and when I got to Bangkok, I discovered that there was a problem there, too.

Q: How did that manifest itself?

LEE: That manifested itself largely through allegations by a couple of visa brokers that an American consular officer was selling visas. We got very close, but we were always absent testimony. We were able to terminate a number of Foreign Service Nationals that were involved in this on sort of a low level basis. In fact, we used the polygraph in that investigation very effectively through the use of the Air Force and what have you and terminated a number of staff. But we really pursued this American on which we had allegations. To this day, I probably firmly believe that he had made an awful lot of money at selling visas but we just lacked someone who was willing to go into a court, hold up their hand, and testify.

Q: When something like this happens, somebody who is a consular officer kind of goes to other consular posts? Were you able to put a warning on and say "This person really shouldn't be put in a position where they can collect money?"

LEE: This fellow was quite smart because he came back to the United States from Bangkok and did not go overseas again. That might have been a built-in feature of not being trailed. But we probably had on that investigation from the time it began to the time it ended four file safe drawers of documentation. We probably interviewed, took statements from, hundreds of people. Of course, not only was there a problem with malfeasance in Bangkok, but there was also, as at most posts like that, a big problem of visa fraud. You've got the rather seedy lot of visa brokers that sort of prey on people wanting to go to the United States and immigrate and what have you. We supported the consular fraud program on that as well. Those were some of the issues we were dealing with.

There was also a period where there was political dissension within the government. During my assignment there, we were the victim of a rocket attack where somebody had put 81 millimeters on the back of a truck and popped 81s into the complex. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but we definitely picked up CNN's(Cable News Network) interest very quickly. CNN's first year was '79.

Q: This is a worldwide television network.

LEE: Yes. It was a very active, very large post. We had about 350 employees at the embassy. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was very big. Again, this next anecdote may offer some interesting thoughts on what it's really like to be in the Foreign Service, particularly for agencies other than the State Department. The DEA, which obviously has responsibility for enforcing U.S. and multilateral anti-drug agreements, had a very large presence in Bangkok because of the Golden Triangle between Thailand and Burma and Laos. One of their senior agents in Bangkok lost his wife. She was murdered. It was a situation where she had gone out shopping one day with a maid and her five year old daughter. She went into a shop to have some shoes repaired. A man walked up to her, looked at her very intently, and grabbed the gold necklace from around her neck. Rather than deal with him, she just simply ran from the shop to get into her car. The car was parked directly across the street from the shop. Waiting in the car was the maid and her daughter. The mother got into the car and pushed the button down on her side of the car. They pushed the buttons down on the back two doors but failed to push the button down on the passenger's side of the front seat.

Q: We're talking about the locking buttons.

LEE: Yes. The criminal came out of the shop, obviously a drug user from what people said at the time. He forced his way into the car, pulled out a handgun, and forced the spouse to drive to a different location. Police officers had seen all this transpiring, so the police were in hot pursuit of the vehicle. What happened next was, you ended up with a hostage barricade situation where the police had cornered the vehicle. They couldn't get out anywhere. I remember the photograph that had been taken by the media. It showed the criminal's arm around the spouse's neck. He was holding the gun to her head when the weapon discharged and she was killed instantly. It really sort of hit home very hard for the entire post. Everybody knew her. Of course, the concern for the daughter and the trauma that it had on her. She was probably inches away when her mother was killed. Everybody looked. We investigated the whole incident enormously. In fact, the regional security office in Bangkok at the time? We got a commendation from DEA because of the work that we had done on the investigation in terms of who this guy was, where he had come from. They really wanted to make sure that there wasn't a hidden agenda here where this guy was targeted and it was the wife that happened to have been the victim. But it was just simply a robbery. I think that kind of a case highlights the need for training. Particularly now in the millennium that we're in, looking back, there's just as much a need now for training on how to prevent those as there was then.

Q: We had the taking of the hostages in Teheran at this time. We had the burning of our embassy in Islamabad in 1978. There was a Japanese Red Army that had hit at some point. Were we concerned about these fundamentalist groups coming after us?

LEE: We were beginning to. If you look back at some of the major hijackings, aircraft bombings, assassinations, there was a former State Department senior officer named Ray Hunt who after he left the Department went to work for the Sinai Field Mission operation and he was based in Rome. He was targeted by one of the Palestinian groups and was killed basically in front of his house as he was arriving. We had one of our consular officials in Strasbourg who there was an attempted assassination on. This was in the early '80s. If you look at that '75 to maybe '80 timeframe, you had a lot of fundamentalist movements underway. Palestinians, Japanese Red Army (JRA), European groups, the Bader-Meinhof gang in Germany was linked to the JRA and other groups. We had hostage takings in Malaysia. We obviously had had some of our problems in Bangkok that were more domestic than transnational. At that time, and I think maybe it was the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Teheran that put a lot of things in motion. The Hezbollah, the Party of God, they were a part of that and they used the takeover of the embassy in Iran really as a foundation for a lot of their other activity, particularly in Lebanon. A lot of these things that were happening on the hostage side were somewhat new to the Foreign Service. Another thing that we were operating at a disadvantage on is that we were not really at a fully developed stage in terms of how to protect embassies physically from takeovers, from facility attacks, things like that. Over the period of 1981 to about 1990, we were developing a lot of documentation studies on how to protect things, putting, for example, concrete boulders in front of buildings and controlling parking and protecting windows and doors and developing the access control system we have in our posts today whereby there is a mantrap system where you can't hold one door open. You enter an area where one door closes and then you move into another. We've gone a long way in a short period of time reducing the risk of major incidents, although if you begin to look at the August 1998 attack on the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, you can never let your guard down.

Q: What were we doing about the drug problem, particularly with the children?

LEE: The drug problem in Bangkok for the children, dependents, teenagers, of our staff there was really an endemic problem. RSOs going as far back as the mid to late '60s, there were reports in the files that young students and children were taking heroin, they were involved in other kinds of drugs and what have you. Thailand at that time, and it probably has not changed, is the kind of place where buying legal drugs or illegal drugs is not a problem. The drug laws are very severe. Generally, when a dependent of a U.S. embassy staff member became involved in drugs, they did the very best to quickly relocate either the entire family or, depending upon the age of the youngster involved, there was an awful lot of education that we were doing within the embassy. We were, for example, giving classes to parents on how to identify drugs, what they looked like, what they smelled like. It did raise some very difficult legal concerns. Fortunately, the ambassador's office in Bangkok at the time I was there had very good relations with the government. Quite often when a case came up where either there was drug abuse or alcohol abuse, they would generally be very cooperative in enabling us to maybe move somebody out of the country rather than getting them caught up in criminal charges that probably would never go anyplace but still would make everybody look bad. It became a political issue as well as really a personnel issue.

Q: We maintained a rather tenuous relationship with Laos. Did you get down there at all?

LEE: I did. My responsibilities as the RSO in Bangkok was also to service our post in Rangoon and Vientiane. I got up to Rangoon and Laos probably once every three months. Laos was much different from Thailand or even Burma. In '79, you easily could have gone back into the '40s. It was functioning at that level. Basic commodities were almost non-existent or difficult to come by. The diplomatic community was very small. Everybody chipped in and helped each other. You still had an awful lot of holdovers from the Vietnam war that were operating and functioning there. It was a very strange place. The risk was difficult for any diplomat going up there because many of the Laotian security components had very extensive dossiers going back to the Vietnam period. For example, anyone that had served in Vietnam had difficulty getting a visa to even go up there. But I fortunately, even though I had served in Vietnam, was able to go up there with no difficulty just simply because of the way the paperwork was handled. I don't think it's changed that much. It's a very difficult place. If we look at 1999 or 2000, Vietnam is still very dysfunctional from a commercial standpoint and Laos would be well below that.

Q: How about Burma? We're talking about a very closed society. What were the security concerns there?

LEE: In the timeframe 1979-'81, you were beginning to have an outbreak of dissent by a number of activists within Burma. That did not gain steam until almost the mid-'90s. When I was traveling to Rangoon a great deal, we had a consulate in Mandalay. People who know Rud Kipling probably can recall "The Road to Mandalay" and all kinds of movies and novels. The consulate was very unique. It was in a very colonial kind of building. Eventually, the consulate was closed simply because there was no longer a need for it to be functioning. I happened to have been involved in a rather minor plane crash traveling from Mandalay back to Rangoon. I was on an Air Burma flight and I crashed on the runway. Many people were hurt but no one was killed. We often used to make jokes that if the couriers had blacklisted Air Burma, why are we still flying it? A very unique kind of country where it was very common to see a 1944 vintage Jeeps driving around town in mint condition. Burma really was extremely poor at that time, still is. It was a very closed society. Only but the best and brightest have a chance of getting out. Despite the interests of the U.S. to help the Burmese intelligentsia go abroad to study and what have you, it was very difficult for them. The conditions were difficult. The big issue at that time in all three countries Laos, Burma, and Thailand was drugs. For example, the DEA at that time when I was in Thailand had a staff of nearly 75, which made it probably the largest agency presence of any at that time.

Q: For our embassies in Laos and Vientiane, or Rangoon, or our consulate in Mandalay, were there any particular security problems in closed communities?

LEE: By and large, in Vientiane, the biggest problem was electrical power. The embassy there was very small with a staff of about eight people, very isolated, very tough, a big hardship. Their problem was electricity, getting food commodities in. Fortunately, they were able to get many shipments through the Defense attaché's flight that often would go up there. No real security problems, although after the takeover of the embassy in Teheran, embassies all over the world were beginning to scratch their head and say, "Gosh, what potentially could happen where I am?" I think that put into play a complete rethinking of how we were protecting our embassies and what have you. In Burma, no major security threats per se. Quite often, there would be a problem of maybe black marketeering by a low level embassy staff member. Problems in Burma often involved the Marine security guard detachment. It's one topic that we haven't really touched upon yet. Dealing with Marine security guards that are single, young, that are in the tour, is a very time consuming process for either an RSO or a post security officer or a principal officer of the post.

Q: Talk a bit about Marine security guards. I would have thought that in a place like Burma, where it's so xenophobic, that this would have been one hell of a problem because these are young men who are out looking for young ladies and I don't imagine the Burmese are very receptive to this.

LEE: Surprisingly, particularly in the few families that might have an educated base, there were some Marine security guards that dated Burmese women. I would say by and large, the Marine security guards that were there (It was a small detachment. I believe they had six Marines) primarily looked to the diplomatic community in terms of dating and recreation and social gatherings. There were outlets for getting close to people of their age, but then again even in foreign embassies most of the people were much older than they were. But on a global level and also on a regional level, sort of keeping the Marine security guard detachments under control and trying to help them protect them from themselves has often been a big job for literally everybody at the post.

Q: What was your relation as RSO with the regional Marine office?

LEE: The relationship between RSOs and the regional Marine officers? Maybe I should explain how that system is set up. Of course, the Marine security guard program provides training to Marine security guards in Quantico, Virginia. In each region that the Department of State has, the Near East, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Europe, they would have a strategic office set up whereby two or three Marine officers would literally do nothing but inspect Marine security guard detachments within their region to ensure that they were complying with all the Marine Corps regulations and that the Marines were being well cared for and supported. There were often problems with the relationship between the regional Marine officers and the RSOs. The same kind of problems that senior officers in the Office of Security or its predecessor, the Diplomatic Security Service, have in Washington. The way the system was set up in terms of the original agreement between the Department of the Navy and the Department of State was that the Marines basically are a body source to fulfill a function. The way that agreement was clarified was that the RSO or a posfor example, TokyTokyo has a detachment of Marines with X number of Marines. They would fall under the operational control of the RSO, but then there would be an administrative channel whereby the Marines could communicate and would be overseen by the regional Marine officer in the regional office wherever they happened to be located. In many management manuals that go back 20-30 years, it often talks about the fact that if you're going to have things working correctly, one person reports to one other person and doesn't report to two people. Unfortunately, in this system, the Marines had two channels of communication. Generally, there was not a problem with the operational control. In other words, "Here is how we want our log books conducted. Here is the kind of passes you have to check. Here is what you have to do in the event of a protest or a demonstration. Here is how to destroy classified material. Here is how to inspect an office to make sure that classified information has been secured." The problems really were that often the regional Marine officer somehow felt that the Marines were getting the short end of the stick. So, it became somewhat of a friendly adversarial role between both the Marine Corps and the State Department. That problem continues to this day. Sometimes Marine security guards adapt very well to a post. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes the detachment commander, who is a senior enlisted man in the Marine Corps, has a hard time dealing with civilians. Sometimes they're just too hard-nosed about things. They really need to realize they're not in a black and grey environment, but a very grey environment.

Q: Was there any thought in the security officer environment of "It might be better to move to the British system," where they usually use retired, married, non-commissioned officers or some very experienced men to go out? They don't give the military presence, but they give a certain amount of maturity and what you get from that.

LEE: I think that in terms of the U.S. Foreign Service, decisions were made over a period of years that doing something similar to that would be impractical, one, because it would be expensive. The British embassy or British foreign service system has often used Gurkhas, for example, or retired military. Actually, the British foreign service does not have nearly the amount of embassies and posts that we have around the world. So, they can do it on an ad hoc basis whereby they might put a Gurkha or retired British army sergeant or what have you maybe in a high threat environment, but they would not do that at all the posts. Today, for example, the administrative officer in the British foreign service pretty much handles all aspects of security. Within the U.S. Foreign Service system, that's the regional security officer program. I think the British have probably lost out in terms of benefits of having their own internal system. Particularly today, or even in years past, the British often were targeted not only for political violence but for crime as well. To give you an example of a deficiency in that regard, about three weeks ago in mid-December 1999, a British diplomat in Swaziland, which generally is a relatively low threat post, was the victim of a carjacking. She had arrived home in her car by herself coming back from a dinner party of some other diplomats. She pulled up in front of her house. There was a gate that had to be opened. As she was about to get out of the car, a man walked up with a gun and broke the window and dragged her through the broken window, taking her keys, leaving her in shock as he drove off in her automobile. The British foreign service system does not have a duty officer system, as does the U.S. Foreign Service. In a situation like that, in 1999, this British diplomat called the U.S. embassy because she knew that there was a duty officer on duty that could render aid. There may have been some sort of unofficial support agreement that if anyone got in trouble, they would call the U.S. embassy. That's a good example of not having your own self-sufficiency.

Q: In '81, you went to where?

LEE: From Bangkok, I went to Washington.

Q: You were there from when to when?

LEE: From 1981 to 1982.

Q: What were you doing?

LEE: I was pulled out of Bangkok short of tour against my will in the middle of winter, taken back to Washington screaming all the way. The hostages were about to be released from our embassy in Teheran and they wanted somebody that was fairly senior in the Office of Security to totally revamp the training program, particularly the kind of training that would be offered to people being posted abroad. So, for the next year and a half or two years, I spent a lot of time developing not only internal security training for what eventually became Diplomatic Security Service but we developed the training that people would be getting when they're sent overseas. At that time, it was called Coping with Violence Abroad and eventually had a new name called the Security Overseas Seminar years later. It was a two day program, very intensive, mainly giving people the skills and information they need to deal with a potential hostage crisis, know what it's like to be a hostage, first aid training in terms of being able to render aid to someone that might be hurt. Those kinds of training objectives were part of that in a very big way. I was not in that office that long because in the latter part of '82, I was selected to go to Panama and be the associate director of security for Latin America.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the training. Preparing people to deal with a problem of hostages is a unique thing. First aid is first aid and what to do if somebody starts shooting or bombing, you duck down, you don't cause trouble. But hostages? What were we trying to impart to our people about a hostage situation?

LEE: The threat that we really were looking at was not just hostage dramas or hostage incidents. There had been hijackings, airport bombings. In 1984/'85, after I left my training assignment, an extremist fundamentalist group killed a number of people in the Rome airport. That was very graphic. Even in the late '70s, we were beginning to see that violent crime was something that was beginning to confront diplomats and their families. So, when we were tasked to develop a training program for Foreign Service staff and their spouses and family members, it became a very difficult job because within the Foreign Service, you have a fairly substantial majority of people that often take the position that this is unnecessary. Even though we had had an embassy taken over and its occupants were held for well over a year, quite often, people will look at that and say, "Well, I'm going to Tokyo. It doesn't have any impact on me." Well, people forget the fact that they might go to a relatively low risk post but then be sent TDY to a very dangerous post or be direct transferred and go from a low threat to a high threat post. I think partly the reason that there were a lot of people that didn't think that a lot of this was necessary was really the fault of our own lack of educating the Foreign Service better. For example, quite often, when we were developing the training programs in the early '80s, we would have maybe a group of 100 Foreign Service officers and spouses and what have you and in the middle of a very important lecture, you would see probably 30-40 of them reading newspapers. There is not much that anyone can say or do to modify that behavior. There is obviously something wrong when you either don't have the ability to hold their attention, they don't perceive the world as you perceive it, or their just lack of good manners prevents them from paying attention. I think when we first sustained some of our major embassy bombings in the year- (end of tape)

The whole issue of a chief of mission or a principal officer being held accountable to the Department and the Congress and others when there was a serious incident really didn't happen until maybe the middle part of the 1980s when the Inman panel began to review many car bomb and other attacks on Foreign Service people. That whole approach that was developed at that time to make a senior officer responsible or at least accountable for what had transpired became very apparent. I dealt not so much with the instruction that was being imparted but really how we could get people to come to the smorgasbord and take a full plate. It's one thing to offer training, but you can't force somebody to learn. I would say that even today with the level of crime and violence that we have, particularly in the developing world, you're still having difficulty getting people to come to the water to drink the message.

Q: The message being what? Techniques to deal with?

LEE: Yes. For example, there might be a block of instruction on sexual assault. Somewhere, somehow, many people believe that being posted abroad, they don't even think about things like sexual assault. And yet when I was director of security at AID years later, we doing a survey throughout the AID world abroad realized that there had been a number of violent rapes that were never reported. So, clearly, touching upon that topic becomes very important for all kinds of reasons emotional, legal, supportive, all aspects. Other training on, for example, a carjacking, which has become a very common crime in developing countries since the mid-'90s. There are specific protocols to follow if you are a carjack victim to reduce your risk of being hurt. Some people will get the message; some people will not. I really do think that it's a behavioral issue. A lot of people believe that the best way to not have to focus on the threat is to act as if it's not there. We've seen it at a lot of high risk posts. For example, El Salvador during the mid-1980s when the rebel violence was very big, we would send Marine security guards, military officers, diplomats to El Salvador. They would get plenty of training before they would leave about the risks and how to deal with those. Within two or three months after arriving, they were functioning in San Salvador as if they were in London. They were going out to places they shouldn't go out to. They were sitting in sidewalk cafes where there had been assassinations by rebels. We had a number of Marines that were killed in San Salvador sitting in a restaurant. What happens is, you go into a high threat environment and a very natural thing happens: you deny that it's really as bad as it is. Dealing with that denial on all different levels becomes a difficult thing when you're trying to train people to deal with this. If you look at a Foreign Service officer or a staff member that is being posted to a Foreign Service post, they're having to worry about their car, they're having to pack up their household effects, they may be going through language training at the same time, they may be trying to rent their home to someone else before they leave, they have a lot of things on their plate. Maybe the wrong time to put them through security training when you really want them to pay attention would be while they're doing all of that. It might make more sense to give that to them maybe at the very first stage following their assignment and leave all those logistical things to the very end as they're about to leave.

Q: You went to Panama from '82 to when?

LEE: To early '85.

Q: This was a period of high conflict in Central America. Why don't we leave that for the next session? But what about the rest of Latin America? Did you have other parts of it?

LEE: I had all of Latin America.

Q: Where else were there problems?

LEE: In Latin America?

Q: Yes.

LEE: Peru, Chile? Everything was going haywire in Latin America at that time because you had the hyperinflation. You had a million pesos in Argentina worth 50 cents.

Q: What did inflation do security-wise?

LEE: It drove up crime. You had inflation everywhere. In Peru in the early '80s, inflation was up to 7,000% per year.

Q: Did we find that American diplomats were particular targets of crime?

LEE: Yes. In that era, they were targets of crime and targets of political violence. That would be a long interview because what I did was respond to all these crises that were happening. Every time there was a kidnapping or an assassination, I went in to help the RSO deal with it.

Q: Why don't we stop at this point? We're going to pick this up again in 1982-'85.

Today is January 18, 2000. Before we get to Latin America, we want to go back to domestic things, '81-'82.

LEE: The Teheran hostages were released on January 20, 1981. I was still in Bangkok as RSO. The Deputy Assistant Secretary for Security at that time, Carl Ackerman, had broken my assignment in Bangkok to bring me back to become Director of Training of the Office of Security of the predecessor organization of Diplomatic Security. The whole purpose of this was that the Teheran hostages were being released and that it was clear that the Department probably needed a new focus on security training from the standpoint of hostage crises and what have you. One has to look at the kind of training that diplomats and their families were getting before the hostage crisis and during it. I think the philosophy within the Department was that with the dramatic aspect of the release of the hostages, the Department needed to be looking at maybe a more cutting edge approach to what Foreign Service personnel were being told about how to not only protect themselves internationally but how to deal with things like mass hostage crises, which was somewhat new to the U.S. In February of 1981, I returned to Washington, took up offices over in Rosslyn, in suburban Northern Virginia, with the mandate of totally revamping the kind of security training the diplomats and their families were getting when they went abroad. It was sort of an interesting period of time because the media coverage surrounding the release of the hostages was very active and frenetic. There were lots of interviews and statements being made about new policies being made related to terrorism and the handling of hostages and what have you. Up until that time, the Department had a training program that was one day initially called "Coping with Violence Abroad." It was a very quick blurb of things that one needed to be thinking about in terms of crime and acts of terrorism, assassination. In Greece, we had had a number of officers in our embassy targeted by the November 17th group. There were other attempted assassinations involving U.S. officials abroad. We had a lot to think about. In addition to revamping the internal security, for example, because of the influx of RSOs and new Foreign Service security officers into the organization at that time, we were doing a lot of things at one time. We did, in concert with the Foreign Service Institute develop a program expanded from the Coping with Violence in a one day format to a two day format. Initially, the Training Division of the Office of Security handled the Coping with Violence Abroad course. As the months went on, there was a lot of discussion about putting that course under the control and operation of the Foreign Service Institute, which eventually happened. The reason we did that was that because of the expansion of the overseas security program, increasing RSOs and special agents within the Office of Security, we felt that doing everything was too much from a manpower standpoint. It probably would have been maybe late '81/early '82 that the Coping with Violence Abroad course was transferred from the Bureau of Administration, where the Office of Security was located, to the Foreign Service Institute, which at that time had offices in Rosslyn, Virginia, as well. It later relocated elsewhere in Arlington, Virginia, a few years later. I think shifting from internal security training to the Coping with Violence Abroad course, I think it's important that we remember that training diplomats and their families to operate internationally in an increasingly high risk environment often cases is difficult. You're dealing with the realities of things like denial. Quite often, a person goes to one posting where the threat is relatively low. They may be direct transferred to a much higher risk post. I guess the preparation that one gets before they leave has to be somewhat broad and diverse to cover varying levels of threat.

I think the aspect of training people in how to conduct themselves from a security standpoint is always fraught with difficulty because you don't want to alarm them; on the other hand, you want to give them the right information that will empower them to act correctly. Even in the early '80s, the period that we're talking about, there was a reluctance to really call a spade a spade in that we weren't being as honest in some respects as we should. Quite often, those that were providing the training were viewed as being alarmist. Today, in the year 2000, we're much more direct. We generally are more open about exactly what people are going to be encountering abroad. It's a very difficult job to actually conduct this training and make it successful.

Q: The impetus for this new look at personal security training came from the hostage crisis in Iran. Did much come out of the debriefing of the hostages that gave new insight?

LEE: The debriefings that many of the hostages went through were very exhaustive. There were a number of federal agencies that talked to them. By and large, the experience that most of them had was very similar. There were in some cases some differences, but by and large, we learned that a hostage experience is life altering regardless of how harsh the treatment or how long the captivity. If we go forward from '81 when the hostages were released to contemporary times in the new millennium, we have seen increasingly more mass hostage operations being conducted by extremist groups. For example, the takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima, Peru, just a few years ago. This was at a time when everyone thought the terrorist threat in Peru had diminished and had become dormant. There have been other examples. Aircraft hijackings, for example. Just a few weeks ago, Indian Airlines? There were Americans that were taken hostage during the hostage takeover of the Japanese ambassador's residence in Lima. They were released early on. It did not become a real political issue from the standpoint of the United States. In Colombia most recently there have been a series of mass hostage takeovers of airlines. In one case, rebels of the National Liberation Army went into a catholic church and seized about 160 people. A number of them were Americans. The threat if we go back a 20 year period, it doesn't necessarily dramatically increase but we are continuing to see mass hostage takeovers of one sort or another. Again, going back to the Teheran experience, we did use those debriefings really to develop the kind of instruction and courses, lectures, that people should be getting. As we're talking, a lot of that training has been put into place. When I was director of training in the Office of Security, we had begun to put a lot of that into place. But the training is constantly changing depending upon the kind of threat and the regions in which these events take place. If we look primarily at what Foreign Service personnel experience when they live abroad, hostage taking and terrorism is really a very minute aspect of that. The reality of Foreign Service life is that there is always going to be the threat of crime, political unrest, demonstrations, natural disasters. In the last two years, from January of 2000, where we are now, we've seen some of the worst natural disasters in a 20-30 year period. The floods that Venezuela has just sustained will probably represent the most serious natural disaster in Latin America during the last 100 years. 50,000 people probably will have been lost when all the toll has been done. While in many cases, when a natural disaster does take place, the primary victims usually are nationals of the countries in which we are represented, but nevertheless our own people to face risk as well. We have had people killed in earthquakes, have had serious problems during national crises. Increasingly, if you look at Africa, Latin America, and Asia, we're continuing to see strikes, labor disputes, demonstrations, the world, in fact, is in flux and the threat does change daily and weekly and from time to time.

Getting back to the training that Foreign Service personnel receive, I've mentioned it before and I'll mention it again because I think it's very important. Being able to develop a training program that is appropriate is one thing, but being able to really get people to focus on the subjects and really acknowledge the seriousness of it sometimes is more difficult.

Q: I think this is one of the problems of all of adult training. People have got other concerns. They're busy getting ready to go places. Adults don't take kindly to people lecturing to them. I find that I have gone through a series of training courses, not necessarily security ones, and you come out feeling good and great ideas and within three days, it's almost gone. That's a continuous problem they have here at the Foreign Service Institute. Most of it is to try to get out there and get people to participate and to try to make it stick.

LEE: That's an interesting point. I think we've talked about this briefly before. It would be appropriate to give the kind of security training that we're talking about for example, as we're talking now, the Department gives a two day course entitled the Security Overseas Seminar to diplomatic staff and families and others that have not been through a similar course in the last five years it might be appropriate to give them that security training maybe three months before they actually depart so that the information can get absorbed a bit and they're not literally giving it short shrift as they're trying to pack out and ship their car and take care of many other things. I think you're quite right. Imparting training to adults is difficult. On the one hand, you've got the training objectives. On the second, you want them to retain what you're trying to impart. But that will probably continue to be a difficult task. Are there any other questions relating to the training that our people get before they go over?

Q: Like most people of my generation, I have put my time in in the military. If captured, it was "name, rank, and serial number" and that was sort of it. As a matter of fact, I was dealing with security intelligence, which made it sort of iffy if you got caught; you didn't feel very comfortable. In the present climate, do you talk to people who might be taken captive about protecting intelligence or is it really how to survive the experience?

LEE: I think you're quite right. Initially, if we go back half a century, particularly from a military/strategic standpoint or a national security standpoint, primarily military personnel, but also civilians were educated and indoctrinated that you protect information at all cost. I think the hostage crisis in Teheran, other hostage experiences that we've had over the last 30-40 years, now have us to the point that particularly with the Cold War having dissipated, with there not necessarily being a massive military adversarial relationship with major powers, today it really is, if you're taken hostage for whatever reason, the important thing is to survive that experience. There is less emphasis on protecting information. If we begin to look at the role of the media vis a vis foreign policy and what our embassies do, it's very hard to keep a secret anymore. So, with the media playing such a carnivorous role in public affairs and government operations, there probably is less emphasis on the information as there was 20-30 years ago.

Q: Let's turn to Latin America, to ARA. You were in Panama?

LEE: I was in Panama from '82-'85. My position was rather unique. It's probably important to explain a bit the kind of role that I fulfilled. At that time, even 15-20 years previous, the Office of Security as they developed the RSO program whereby you would put a professional level security officer in a particular region or at a particular post, the concept was a position called a regional security officer. In many respects, when the program first developed in the early '60s, an RSO in fact actually was regional. In most cases, the RSO had a series of posts that he or she was responsible for. They were spread very thin. For example, the RSO had all of Spain and very likely other countries as well. In Eastern Europe because of the realities of the Cold War, an RSO in Sofia, Bulgaria, simply had that post because of all the information security aspects and counterintelligence and what have you. As the world got more complex, more active, more threats increased, so did we increase the number of RSOs abroad. As time went on, it was pretty much assumed that if you had an major embassy, they would have an RSO. This would have been the case until probably the early '80s. If we look at contemporary times in the role of the Diplomatic Security Service within the Department, now you're in a situation where the major embassies may have several RSOs fulfilling different roles. We've gone from a period of being spread very thin to having adequate staffing. The bombing of our embassies in Tanzania and Kenya will probably have a greater effect in that there will probably be additional RSO positions unfolding over the next couple of years.

Trying to explain the role that I had in Panama, because of the influx of RSOs in the early '70s and '80s, the management of the Office of Security at that time felt it was appropriate to have assigned to each region a functional officer entitled associate director of security. This was generally a very senior officer that had had a number of RSO assignments at other posts who had the right communication and political skills to be able to talk to ambassadors and principal officers and what have you on a wide range of security topics. In many respects, the Assistant Deputy Secretary fulfilled a quasi-training responsibility in that he or she would impart guidance to the RSOs at a particular post if they were relatively new to the Service or new to the Foreign Service. It was a very useful office position to have. Ambassadors again often would confer with the Assistant Deputy Secretary in terms of the performance of the RSOs but just generally getting maybe a second opinion on a number of things. I found the position very interesting, very satisfying. In my role in Panama, although I was based in Panama City, I traveled extensively throughout Mexico and Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, an enormously large region. If we look at the early '80s, there were some interesting things happening. Manuel Noriega, the military dictator of Panama at the time, although it did have a nominal civilian president, later was apprehended in Operation Just Cause when then President Bush engaged in military operation in Panama to apprehend Noriega on the basis of his connection to drug cartels. So, there was the experience of operating in Panama during the Noriega years. You've got to remember that in 1982 about the time I was going to Panama, the Sandinistas were alive and well in Nicaragua. There was literally a war throughout Central America with the exception of Panama and Costa Rica. The Contra period was somewhat controversial. Then there was the guns for hostages and all the interesting things that were going on during that period. Of course, in the early '80s, we still had Augusto Pinochet, the dictator in Chile. You had a number of countries that were moving from dictatorial governments to democratic during the period that Ronald Reagan was President. We were having a lot of threats against our people in probably 12 countries Brazil, Argentina? In '82, the British and the Argentines went to war over the Malvinas islands. That was short-lived but was a military action. Central America was primarily our biggest concern.

Q: So often Mexico is a world apart. Was it part of your beat?

LEE: It was.

Q: We'll come to that. But let's talk about Central America at the time. Talk a bit about how Noriega was seen by you on the security side and your relationship with the DEA.

LEE: You could probably talk to 30 people and you might get 30 different explanations about Manuel Noriega. First of all, he really was a product of the U.S. military mystique. He was trained by the U.S. in different forms. He probably was a military access point for the U.S. Defense Department for a number of years. Probably when he was getting a lot of training in the United States and elsewhere, no one really thought that he was going to become this dictator who ran Panama, where we had a very heavily military presence to begin with. The drug trafficking allegations had always been there during the period that Noriega was establishing himself as a dominant figure in Panamanian politics. It became clear that he was working behind the scenes, manipulating civilian presidencies and what have you. During the Reagan and the Bush years, it became very clear that Noriega's connection with drugs was a real problem. It was a real problem for the U.S. because it literally had positioned Noriega to be where he was. At that particular juncture, it became appropriate from a foreign policy standpoint to sort of neutralize Noriega's involvement in drug trafficking. The DEA has always played a very active role in foreign policy in Latin America, particular insofar as drug interdiction and anti-trafficking programs. We could talk for hours about the effectiveness of it either in Latin America or Asia or wherever. It's pretty clear that drugs are produced in a number of developing countries throughout the world, much of it in Latin America. Colombia is a big transient point for coca paste in Bolivia and Peru and a number of other countries. What is interesting about the Noriega period is that while there was an awful lot of drugs passing through Panama under the control of Noriega and his relationship with the Colombian drug cartels, there was very little drug use internally. After Noriega was sort of neutralized, taken to the U.S., tried, put in prison, where he continues to be, drug use actually has escalated in Panama. There probably is as much drug trafficking as there ever was. It's just that other people are handling the process. Whether you eliminate a Manuel Noriega or not, the realities of drug trafficking are always going to be there.

Q: On your part, what were your concerns in Panama per se?

LEE: The concerns in Panama were relatively minor. I had an interesting position in Panama in that I chaired an interagency working group both at the U.S. SOUTHCOM (Southern Command) headquarters, where the U.S. military was established? It's called the South American Liaison Group, SALG. Essentially what we did was look at the Latin American region in terms of crisis management, review security and crisis management plans that were coming to us from a number of our posts in Latin America, determining how practical they were, how effective they would be in a genuine emergency. We were looking at all aspects: natural disasters, evacuation, political insurrection, possibly an expansion of what we were seeing in Latin America possibly occurring in the South American region. That was really separate and distinct of what I did in terms of reviewing the operations of RSOs throughout that region. But the realities of our problems in Central America were dominant at that particular time.

Getting back to your question about Panama per se, the threat was relatively low, although the crime threat was increasing. Panama always was sort of an expansion of the U.S. military complex around the world. You had the Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, very heavy emphasis and influence by the U.S. My own personal impression of Panama is that it never really had a nationalism of its own because of the presence of the United States. Many Foreign Service officers that served there often found it a strange kind of country to be in. English was so widely spoken. You had U.S. facilities all over the place. It was very difficult to get to know Panamanians because of this overbearing influence of the United States. But the threats and security problems we had were relatively minor.

Q: Let's talk about the "big enchilada," using the Nixon term: the war that was going on in Nicaragua and El Salvador that spilled over into Guatemala and Honduras. What were you doing? What were your concerns?

LEE: Our concerns were very multifaceted. There was a belief that there are different levels of the U.S. government that, if the conflict in Central America were to escalate, it could go in a number of different directions. It potentially could spill over into Mexico, which would be very problematic. It might spill over into South America, where there were different but similar problems. One interesting point that needs to be made about Latin America before we go on is what politically was going on in the region that concerned us. That was the liberation movement that Fidel Castro espoused back in the mid-'60s. In 1967, Fidel Castro, by then well seated in his position in Havana, invited extremist political ideologists, people that were unhappy with the status quo in Latin America, to Havana for what he designated as a liberation movement symposium. Che Guevara, all of the household words in terms of Latin American extremism were invited. They were encouraged to go back to their countries primarily in South America, Central America, and even in Mexico, and develop a leftist philosophy of agrarian reform, moving the wealth of these countries into the hands of the common man, giving everyone property. It looked very good ideologically from one standpoint, but it just simply would never work in many others. That led to the development of a lot of nationalistic leftist terrorist organizations, extremist organizations - the FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional, Armed Forces of National Liberation), for example, in Nicaragua, the FMLN (Farabundo Martí Liberation Front) in El Salvador, the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) in Guatemala, the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) in Peru, although that came a few years after Castro's advocacy for liberation groups. If we look at the late '70s, early '80s, you had major rebel guerrilla extremist groups in just about every Latin American country. You still had dictatorial governments in many respects. Of course, Anastasio Somoza, the dictator of Nicaragua, was unseated in 1979 by the Sandinista movement. They ended up having control of Nicaragua for a number of years.

But getting back to what we were most concerned about: expansion of this level of extremism throughout the region. We were concerned about another Sandinista experience. Here you had literally a country that was doing reasonably well, although it was under dictatorial control. They then went to the Sandinista period where literally it was a puppet of Russia and Castro's Cuba. Very, very difficult period of time. We were concerned about our people. There were a number of military advisors in El Salvador and Honduras primarily trying to advise central governments on how to deal with this rebel onslaught that was being experienced. A good example of some of the things that I became involved in: we often would have military advisors in El Salvador being targeted. We had a number of them killed. We had similar threats in Honduras, where U.S. forces that were there were coming under attack. We had our own people being targeted. In many cases, there were facility attacks throughout Latin America but also in Central America bombings, for example, small arms attacks, in some cases hostage taking, assassination. It was a very difficult period. At the same time, on a global level, the Office of Security was attempting to develop security standards for many of our buildings.

We were beginning to look at things like providing armored cars at many of our posts for chiefs of mission and principal officers, moving our staff from home to office in protective vehicles. These were real issues. We had had people killed. There was an enormous amount of pressure on the Office of Security to come up with rather quick solutions to many of these real problems.

The dynamics of Central America were difficult on all of our posts in that region. There was big emphasis on El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. The Contras primarily operated out of Honduras and often engaged in operations in Nicaragua. The military advisory program in El Salvador? And yet in Guatemala at that time, there still was a dictatorship alive and well. Panama was somewhat of an enigma in that it was really the seat of regional military support in terms of the United States. Not to repeat myself, but it was a period that probably was unique in contemporary American history.

Q: We had this anomaly of a fairly large embassy in Nicaragua and yet we were certainly in rhetoric and in action actively promoting a war against the government there. Was there consideration of getting the hell out of Nicaragua? It seems odd that we were there.

LEE: I think if we look at foreign policy generally, quite often, we do things that in retrospect don't make a lot of sense. Just in the last year or so we're in January 2000 the U.S. in concert with NATO embarked on a very interesting form of military operation in Yugoslavia to unseat, in essence, a dictator there because of human rights violations against a minority within that region.

In Nicaragua, literally everybody was forced out when the Sandinistas nationalized corporations and companies and what have you. The multinationals left, but we still had an embassy. It was very comparable to the kind of posting that we have in Havana, although it was not operating through a U.S. interests section. It was a very hostile environment for our people. I think what is most interesting is the manner in which former president Jimmy Carter really let this happen in that you had a country that was functioning economically reasonably well, although not maybe optimally from a standpoint of human rights. And then this country is literally turned upside down and the results of that happening, you end up with a regional war. Had Somoza remained in Nicaragua, had the U.S. supported him to a greater extent, that war might very well have been avoided. Again, we are able to look at history in terms of maybe what might have been done differently, but clearly, there are dictators throughout the world. If we look at Chile, for example, Pinochet remained there well after Somoza, almost 10 years after Somoza. From a critical standpoint, why unseat Somoza and not unseat Pinochet? Obviously, the economics of those two countries are much different. But once again, we often see that the consistency that we have in one country is not the consistency we have in another.

Q: When you were dealing in Nicaragua, did you have contact with the Nicaraguan police force?

LEE: Oh, no. It was a very hostile environment. When we went to Managua, for example, it was very controlled, almost as if you were going to Havana. What actually happened was, President Carter at the time really by not fully supporting Somoza, the Sandinista period was the result. You had a Nicaraguan embassy in Washington. We had a U.S. embassy in Managua, but it was a very hostile environment. Clearly, anyone that was operating in Nicaragua from a business standpoint was pretty much forced out when it was nationalized. Daniel Ortega, the president of Nicaragua at the time as the top Sandinista, engaged in a reign of terror against people that had terrorized him during the Somoza years. In Nicaragua itself, we did not have that many security problems. But throughout Central America, we did.

Q: How about El Salvador? What was your involvement there?

LEE: I often went up to San Salvador mainly to either confer with the ambassador or the RSO on a number of protective issues. For example, we were fortifying our embassy. We had had it attacked a number of times. There were lots of bomb attacks in San Salvador. Crime was almost unheard of in San Salvador during the period of the conflict in Central America. After the peace accord in 1992 between the government and the FMLN, crime went up dramatically. This was largely because you ended up with a lot of ex-soldiers and guerrillas that continued to have weapons, they had no jobs, so the crime was a byproduct. We had a couple of military advisers assassinated when I was in Panama. I often went up there to assist the post in dealing with that, conducting interviews, investigations, what have you. Very interesting period of time. High level of threat.

Q: In doing your interviews, who was doing the assassinating?

LEE: The FMLN, the leftist rebel group, the primary group (there were a number of groups operating in El Salvador, but the FMLN was the largest umbrella terrorist group), assassinated a military advisor as he was sitting in his car waiting for his girlfriend. He was a very well trained military officer but obviously was not really geared to the kind of threats that we had in San Salvador at the time. Of course, because the U.S. Congress was so interested in what was going on in Central America, anytime there was an attack on one of our facilities or one of our people, there had to be a lot of documentation and double checking and making sure that we had done everything according to law.

Q: Did you feel in your job the influence one way or another of the political fact that a significant portion of at least the personalities, the chattering class, were siding with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua? It was not only the left, but whatever passes for the intellectual pass. They saw this as a continuation of the Vietnam War. Did that impact you at all?

LEE: Not really. It didn't affect the way in which we conducted ourselves. Clearly, there was an awful lot of sympathy of many of the leftist rebel groups in Latin America in the U.S. at the time as well as in Europe. But it didn't really affect us. I think that the ambassadors that were in many of our embassy at the time were constantly bedraggled by the media, quite often maybe a media sympathetic to the FMLN in El Salvador. If you begin to look at the ideology that prevailed at that time, it was easy to buy into the idea that everybody ought to be able to have their own property and farm it. But El Salvador is one of the smallest countries in the world with enormous density and with wealth distributed within a number of major families within that country. Literally distributing wealth is extremely difficult from a practical standpoint.

Q: Were we finding any ties between the supporters of Nicaragua in the U.S. and attacks on us? Was there a network that was more than just giving public support?

LEE: There was a lot of disinformation that was being leveled against us through a "three headed snake," where you had Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Nicaragua. They were all engaging in that disinformation against the United States in different ways in different places. In Europe, from the standpoint of the Soviet Union, in the Caribbean from the standpoint of Cuba, and in Latin America from the standpoint of Nicaragua, and despite the fact that the Sandinistas did not have an awful lot of hard cash of their own, the Soviet Union gave them enormous material support. For example, all the really heavy weaponry and armament and air power came from the Soviet Union at that time. That was one reason why this war went on for a number of years because of the kind of support that the Sandinistas had in different spheres of the world.

Q: But were there groups within the U.S. who were giving more than lip service to supporting them?

LEE: Oh, sure. There were a number of sympathetic and many of them non-profit organizations in the United States that were clearly linked with the Sandinista movement, that were trying to influence Congress, that were engaging in illegal lobbying in many respects, collecting money in the U.S., in some cases diverting that to the Sandinistas directly. There was in essence a quiet insurgency in the United States that was based on what was going on in Nicaragua.

Q: Were we getting much information on this? Were you aware of it?

LEE: From my viewpoint in Panama and what I did in Latin America, there was not an awful lot of information about that. This really came out years later, particularly as the war was winding down and as the Iran Contra scandal began to unfold during the mid-'80s, 1986/'87/'88. I think a lot of that inquiry by the U.S. Congress brought a lot of these things to everyone's knowledge.

Q: Going to Mexico, it had such a close relationship with us. It's a big country, sort of the colossus to the south at least within the Northern Hemisphere. What were your concerns? We had such close ties at every level, FBI, whatever you think about. We have long-term relationships. The government at the foreign policy level seems to be one place where we have disputes. But in other cases, there is a lot of cooperation.

LEE: Mexico is an extraordinarily interesting country and not just in contemporary times but going back 50-60 years after the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Our embassy there has always been one of the dominant embassies in the world, mainly because of the amount of trade between the U.S. and Mexico. If we look back to the period that I was in Panama, things in Mexico were doing reasonably well economically. We had very few threats against our people in Mexico. The criminal threat in Mexico City was relatively low. And yet if we look at that period, corruption has always been a dominant concern of the United States. As years went on, we would find the drug connection to be interwoven in the corruption and in the way in which the country actually operates. The North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], which unfolded in the mid-1990s-

Q: Let's stick to '82-'85.

LEE: I'm just trying to get some perspective here. The period that we're talking about, there was a bubbling level of extremism in Mexico that never really took heart as it did elsewhere in Latin America. There were a number of rebel groups but they never had enough popular support to become a serious problem. The period that I was in Latin America and traveling to Mexico, our biggest concern was the 1985 earthquake, which disrupted our embassy to a large degree for months. Of course, from a consular standpoint, finding out where people were, who was alive, who had been hurt, who had been killed, it was a very complicated period of time. I actually traveled probably less to Mexico than I did anywhere else. There just weren't any major problems.

Q: Let's turn to the Caribbean before we go to the Southern Hemisphere. Cuba. Were you involved at all with Cuba?

LEE: I made a couple of trips to Havana simply to review the RSO's operation there in the Swiss embassy. Hostile environment against Americans unquestionably at that time. By and large, our foreign policy has been very consistent if you go back to the establishment of the embargo. I made perfunctory trips there, but they were pretty much uneventful. Most of what I did was internal within the interests section itself. The staff was relatively small. The biggest concern of the RSO was counterintelligence and being a clearinghouse for information relating to hostile intelligence.

Q: During this '82-'85 period, Cuba was seen as the fomenter of problems all throughout Latin America?

LEE: Absolutely. Fidel Castro was generally considered to be a strategist behind a lot of what was going on. Once the liberation movement began to unfold in Latin America, he didn't have a direct role, but he played a supportive role. The Soviet Union and Cuba often provided material support to a lot of these rebel groups. They supported them financially in many respects. A lot of rebel groups were routinely given training in Cuba or in the Soviet Union. That's really the reason that this liberation movement was so powerful because it had the clout and the influence of the Soviet Union and Cuba behind it.

Q: What about Jamaica? When one thinks of Jamaica, one thinks of crime. Was that a problem for you?

LEE: Crime in Jamaica has always been there. During the period that I was in Latin America covering the Caribbean, we didn't have any major incidents. I think that there were some serious crimes, but generally those were handled quite effectively by the post. Again, I probably went to the Caribbean very little. During the period that I was there, we did have the military operation in Grenada and we supported that from many different aspects.

Q: Had Grenada been of concern to you? Of course, we didn't have a post in Grenada. But while you were in Panama, prior to putting troops in and extracting our people and overturning the government, it was getting more and more chaotic on this little island. Was this something that you were concerned with?

LEE: The radicalism that was unfolding in Grenada actually was being followed carefully by our ambassador in Barbados. Our ambassador in Barbados also was responsible for Antigua at the time. I think probably there was a lot of reporting going on between our embassy in Barbados to the United States, to the Department, to the Defense Department, to the point that President Reagan probably looked at the facts that he was getting, was concerned about a possible escalation of this radicalism within the Caribbean and went into Grenada at the time.

I found that the normalization period in Grenada was very interesting in the way in which we created our embassy there and began to engage in development of the island once the government that had been instituted was unseated? I forget the individual's name who came to power, but he eventually was hanged or died.

Q: That was part of the precipitating events that caused us to put our troops in.

LEE: That's correct.

Q: But from your perspective things were pretty well taken care of?

LEE: Yes. Our primary role was to develop a security program within the embassy that would be comparable to what we had elsewhere in the Caribbean. There was some concern there might be again an expansion of this strange radicalism that we had seen from Bishop. It was just precautionary.

Q: Haiti? Dominican Republic? Any problems there?

LEE: Haiti was always a problem for us even during the period that I was in Panama. If you begin to look at the '82 period, Baby Doc Duvalier was still in power. The Tonton Macoutes was alive and well. I didn't make that many trips to Port au Prince because you had a dictatorship. We did not have a lot of the political unrest that we later saw in years after that.

Q: Shall we save the Southern Hemisphere for the next time?

LEE: Yes.

Q: The next time we'll pick it up starting with Colombia in this '82-'85 period.

Today is March 6, 2000. You were associate director of security?

LEE: For Latin America based in Panama.

Q: We're now coming to Colombia from '82-'85.

LEE: My responsibility in Panama was unique. At that time, the Office of Security or Diplomatic Security's predecessor organization, had five associate directors of security, each for one of the geographic regions that linked up with the Department's geographical breakdown of posts overseas. My responsibility was as the associate director of security for Latin America and the Caribbean, which meant that I traveled 70% of the time conducting audits and inspections of RSO operations. I also did that from time to time at posts where there was not an RSO but a post security officer.

The best way to look at that period of time would be to look at those countries where there were very interesting things going on. Countries that come to mind were Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela.

Colombia was a country that I traveled to more frequently than any other. At that particular time, I spent a lot of time in either El Salvador, Honduras, or Colombia, mainly because of the kinds of programs that the U.S. government was involved in at either the policy level or operational level. The environment in Colombia at that time was very problematic. The M-19 (19th of April Movement), which no longer exists but then was a political force in contemporary Colombia, was one of the most active rebel groups in Colombia. They had been responsible for a big number of the major kidnappings of multinational executives and also government officials of one sort or another. The M-19 later was involved in the Palace of Justice takeover in Bogota. It was also involved in the takeover of the Dominican Republic embassy in 1980, where our ambassador and a number of other diplomats and a couple of hundred others were held hostage for a couple of months. The M-19 in that case was basically let go. They were given a lot of money and they flew off to Cuba. So, in the '82-'84 timeframe, when I was in Panama, I had an occasion to go to Colombia to deal? The anti-drug program was beginning to escalate. The Pablo Escobars were beginning to establish their presence in Medellin and Cali and various other places. But from a policy standpoint, the U.S. government was very concerned about political stability in Colombia at the time. At that time also, we literally restricted travel throughout the country for any official American. We did have a consulate in Barranquilla, but we closed our consulate in Cali and a number of other places. The environment was very high threat. There were bombings in Colombia and Bogota. Some were anti-U.S. Some were anti-foreign. There were other embassies that were also targeted. The bombings were not necessarily large car bombings as we had in Beirut, but they were sufficiently strong and powerful enough to hurt people in office buildings and what have you. I would say that if you look at Colombia then and now, in many ways, it's gone through a metamorphosis to the point that now political instability in Colombia is much worse than it was even then. It's a question of adapting to what level of instability we're dealing with.

Are there any specific issues that you'd like me to cover in terms of Colombia?

Q: Yes. You were concerned about the safety of the embassy and the consulate?

LEE: That's correct.

Q: How does one deal with that in Colombia? What were you doing?

LEE: In '82, you really have to look at where the State Department was vis a vis the protection of official Americans from a policy standpoint. The first Beirut car bombing had not yet occurred. We really were still not really doing a lot in terms of building security, although we were doing it in a very haphazard kind of way. Our biggest concern at that time was trying to put a massive band-aid on a problem. As we've learned over the years, finding new embassy sites, establishing a setoff distance where a building could be constructed, having adequate access controls without literally turning people off is very difficult to do. We had a number of situations where bombs had gone off near the embassy in Bogota. Broken glass. What we were most concerned about was people being hurt when those bombings took place, so we put into effect a program whereby we would install shatter resistant foam, for example. Then there were other heavier security being installed in, let's say, the lobby of the consulate, the lobby of the chancery, and what have you. Our big job was really trying to work with the ambassador. The RSO had a large office there and several officers. Many of them were involved in bodyguard work, protecting the ambassador.

Q: Do you remember who the ambassador was?

LEE: There were several during my tenure there. The ambassador you mentioned before? This was in between Diego Asencio and Tony Gillespie. But there were in addition to the building problems ongoing kidnappings of Americans. It was before the period that I was there that there was a situation where a Peace Corps volunteer had been kidnaped and ended up being killed in captivity. What I learned from this bad experience and other experiences I had in dealing with the embassy in Bogota was that there was a fine line in terms of the way the U.S. embassy dealt with the kidnapping of Americans. The no ransom/no negotiate policy was formulated during the Kissinger years and was still with us and continues to be with us. Basically, it's a good policy. It has really prevented an awful lot of diplomats from being seized and kidnaped over the years because extremists know that they really aren't going to get any money or concessions, that we aren't going to release prisoners or give them guns or what have you. But in a way I developed an empathy for U.S. companies operating in countries like Colombia because they were going to get very little help from the party line. Unfortunately, the politicians have to realize that for a company to put somebody in Colombia or another high threat country where there is the risk of kidnapping, they really have to take the position of paying ransom. That's the way it works. Otherwise, you'd never get people to go. Of course, that raises a very interesting question. How is it the Department of State or the Foreign Service gets people to willingly be exposed to these kinds of risks when, in fact, the private sector finds it very objectionable and difficult? That's something I wrestled with for a number of years. The only difference is the profit aspect of the way a company works is much different than the way the government works. But during my visits and inspections to Bogota, the big emphasis was on making sure that we didn't have any people kidnaped, we didn't have any bombing incidents. We were working in a number of multi-agency settings where we had the intelligence function of the embassy, we had drug enforcement, narcotics assistance, the consular function. So many aspects were focusing on making sure that we didn't have a major incident. During those years, the infrastructure that Diplomatic Security had or did not have was much different than it is today. Those were the years where if you were lucky, you had a very small budget not only to protect buildings but to protect people and what have you. The period in Colombia was difficult because the threat was so high. We were very fortunate that many of the preventative things were put in place and worked.

Q: Did you find a great deal of attention was paid to the ambassador? The ambassador often is the focal point of attempts.

LEE: Yes. Clearly, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (Ejercito Nacional de Liberacion, National Liberation Army) and the M-19 were constantly rattling sabers in terms of they were going to assassinate the ambassador, were going to try to kidnap him. That went on both before and after I was there right up until contemporary times of the year 2000. In many respects, the effort to secure peace in Colombia has been a very elusive idea. Probably if we look at the year 2000, the current president, who went into that presidency thinking he could secure peace with the FARC and ELN, I think he was very naive. The FARC nor the ELN really want peace with the government. There is nothing the government can give them that they don't already have, which is lots of money from drug traffickers, ransomed kidnapping, and other profit operations they have. Of course, long after you and I are no longer around, that issue will probably continue to be dealt with. This is a rebel movement that's been in force for 40 years. To date, there has been no effective process of peace.

Q: Did you find in Colombia and elsewhere that the CIA was particularly helpful in identifying and doing this or were you working almost separately?

LEE: Never separate paths. When you begin to look at the function of an intelligence representative, the station chief of a CIA operation at an embassy, they are the intelligence advisor to the chief of mission, they do an awful lot of things mandated by their own headquarters. We're not talking just about CIA, but about the Defense Intelligence Agency, other intelligence apparatuses that are there. Generally, the RSOs and my role in being the senior DS person in the region at that time, we worked very closely with the CIA and with other intelligence agencies. The problem in Latin America at that time, there was an awful lot of competition going on between CIA, DIA, the Defense attaché, the MILGROUPE (another separate organization that stemmed out of the SOUTHCOM operation in Panama), the FBI was beginning to establish a foothold in Latin America as well through its legal attaché program. So, the real issue was, who is stepping on who? My experience was that the coordination could have been a lot better. On the one hand, when I was in Panama, we had an office in the State Department called the Office for Combating Terrorism. There was a former ambassador who had been the ambassador in Brazil, Robert Sayer. He was the coordinator for anti-terrorism programs. His office had training programs that were available to foreign governments. On the one hand, you had him trying to promote certain programs that he was putting together. On the other hand, you had the CIA doing various types of training programs. You had the military group doing another. You had a defense attaché group doing another. Sometimes in looking at what we were doing, I got the impression that from the standpoint of the foreign governments that we were trying to assist, they often would wonder, "Gosh, who is stepping on who? Who is on first? Who is on second?" It made us look as if we were all competing for clients, which should not have been the way that was conveyed. I think that is a very significant reality of the way the federal government works. There is not an awful lot of coordination. People just sort of do their own thing because of either agency rivals or the fact that they have a better solution when, in fact, there really ought to be a unified effort. If I had any observation to make of a constructive nature, many chiefs of mission don't seem to be trained or understand how to really build the teamwork stuff that goes on at a post, particularly a large post.

Q: What about Venezuela? That was quite a different situation than Colombia, or not?

LEE: Venezuela at that time was probabland again we are looking at 1982-'8one of the success stories in Latin America, particularly South America. It had the strength of its oil infrastructure. Even today in the year 2000, it's the third largest oil producer in the world. It had a stable government, a strong democracy, one of the oldest democracies in Latin America. We really didn't have any real political instability issues to worry about. We did have a problem with major fluctuation in currencies throughout Latin America. That was really causing an increase in crime. Venezuela had had a rebel movement called the Red Flag that went back into the '50s and '60s. But generally we didn't have the kind of problems in Venezuela that we had in Colombia, in Peru, in other parts of the region. It was very much like Chile. It was a commercial center. It had lots of money. That changed as time went on as corruption really took hold. Again, I was looking at a period, '82-'83. We're now 20 years hence. We've seen, despite all this oil, the quality of life in Venezuela decline largely because of corruption. There is plenty of money. The question is that it's not going into public coffers.

Q: As you're working on security, did you find in dealing in Latin America, where corruption was getting to be major, did you find this spilling over into our operations? One, corruption is a political phenomenon that we observe and are concerned about. Two, corruption is one where if it starts tainting our people, then? Did you find that there was much of a spillover?

LEE: I think we were seeing it spill over from the standpoint of the consular function. When you begin to look at political corruption, assuming that there isn't a deterrent to that, you then begin to see it spill over into the issuance of visas, passport fraud. The one unique link to what was going on in Latin America was the increase in drugs. There is a correlation between drug trafficking and visas and passports. So, probably unlike previous years prior to '82-'85, we were beginning to see a sophistication level of fraud where people wanted visas, they wanted passports, and one way to do that would be to get to a local employee who could be coopted, who could either provide information or make a dent in the way the system works or ease the possibility of fraud occurring. The most obvious evidence of corruption that might be endemic to a political- (end of tape)

That was something that the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Office of Security was most concerned with. We were seeing visa fraud and malfeasance turning up everywhere, not just in Latin America. It did become very disruptive to consular operations.

But again, getting back to Venezuela, we had rising crime. That was because of the hyperinflation. But other than that, there was not any major political concerns going on. Now, Venezuela is much different.

Q: Bolivia, I imagine, was?

LEE: During the period that I was in Panama covering Bolivia, it had a reputation for going through an awful lot of governments. If you look at a 100 year period, the Bolivian government had like 150 governments. As time went on, we saw that improve. Bolivia is a phenomenally interesting country. We did have some rebel activity that we dealt with when I was there. There were some attacks against the Marine security guard detachment. But nothing like what we were seeing in Peru, Colombia, El Salvador, and parts of Central America. By and large, Bolivia was a relatively low threat environment.

Q: How about Peru?

LEE: Peru at that time was fascinating. In 1980, the Maoist Sendero Luminoso emerged. This was in keeping with Castro's plan to try to get liberation rebel movements operating in all Latin American countries. The Sendero Luminoso was severely underestimated by the intelligence gurus at the U.S. embassy. I began to travel to Lima in the middle part of 1982. I recall one of the senior intelligence officials at the embassy stating that the Sendero Luminoso were a group of buffoons. I recall saying to this man, "I think you're wrong." As it turned out, I was right. Between 1980 and on, particularly during the years that I was there, the level of violence was just incredible. In many respects, it was worse than Colombia because the country had less of a system to work with. The Peruvian security forces were badly trained, they were badly motivated even compared to Colombia. Our embassy was very vulnerable. We had to do an awful lot of quick fix work to protect the embassy because it was right on a major thoroughfare. There were also some problems within the Consular Section. During that whole period, we were trying to just keep the ambassador safe, keep the residence from being blown up (There were a number of bomb attacks against the ambassador's residence. There was never an attack on he himself.). But it was a very interesting period when you didn't have diplomats in the U.S. embassy going outside of Lima because the rebels, the Sendero guerrillas controlled the countryside.

Q: Was there a strong anti-American cast to this Shining Path?

LEE: Very much so. That's one commonality of all of the leftist rebel movements in Latin America. They were all primarily anti-U.S., anti-multinational, anti-imperialist. That was their standard philosophy no matter where you happened to be. We were very lucky in that we never had any of our people assassinated, but the risk was clearly there. It was very routine for bombings to put all the electricity out in Lima. We were putting generators in residences. We were trying to do everything we could to reduce that risk.

Q: How were we assessing the catholic churches at the parish priest level, the so-called "liberation theology?" Did we see that as an instigating force into what was happening?

LEE: I think that the liberation theology, which suggests that the Catholic Church, particularly the Jesuits, were sort of a sympathetic force for the rebel movements that existed in that the rebel movements were really geared at least they claimed to be geared to empowering the poor, the impoverished, with some aspect of the system (i.e. land reform or what have you) to enable everyone to be able to farm their own land and what have you. The liberation theology that became very popular in Central America did not trickle down into South America as it did into Central America. Partly that was because there were supportive forces in the United States and in Europe that were very sympathetic to many of the rebel movements in Central America. The fact that Central America was closer made it a lot easier for that kind of support in the U.S. to occur. Generally, in Peru, it was not a major problem. In El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, it was clearly a problem. Actually, that liberation theology began to lose steam really by the late '80s. But it was a serious problem in the mid-'80s.

Q: Did you find in Peru in your efforts to protect our embassy much help from the government, which was a left-wing military government at that point and not very friendly towards the United States?

LEE: No. The host government in Lima was really not terribly supportive. Even our own ambassador did not have terrific relations with them. In many respects, the Peruvian government at that time was looking for someone to give them the answers to the rebel problem. But no. I can remember us wanting to put in barriers around the embassy on street level. We grappled with trying to go through different ministries. Finally, we said, "The hell with it. We're just going to put them up." It's a lot easier to ask for forgiveness after you've done something, but if you ask permission, they're probably going to say, "No." That's what happened. Once we put them up, then we didn't have any problem. I think generally if you look at all of Latin America, there were a few governments that were terribly cooperative with what we were doing, largely because of the inflation of the currencies in South America. In Argentina, the Dirty War was still underway. In Chile, Augusto Pinochet was still dictator. It's difficult to remember the way Latin America was at that time compared to how it either is now or in years past.

Q: How about Chile? How were things during this '82-'85 period?

LEE: That was a difficult period for our embassy and the presence. The embassy was in a rather decrepit old bank building that was very dusty, dark, and gloomy. It's often been said that Augusto Pinochet wasn't so bad, that he really helped develop the economy that Chile has today. But I recall a very interesting thing happening where one of our Foreign Service local employees, particularly our Foreign Service national investigator, was involved in a matter where we had asked him to conduct some investigations. It was a very routine kind of thing, but apparently he had sort of infringed into the DINA (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional, National Intelligence Directorate), which was in essence the secret police. The next day, he didn't come to work. Another day went by and we really didn't know what happened to him. He had been interrogated by the secret police. Electrodes had been affixed to his genitals. This guy really went through hell. The embassy really did not complain because it would have gone nowhere. Pinochet really was a very utilitarian kind of dictator. Of course, we were still smarting a little bit from his taking over the government back in '73. I think the policy position of the Department of State was, "Let's just not make any waves." Then as years went on, things improved. But it was not a friendly place to be in dealing with the Chilean security forces.

Q: But in '82-'85, in one way, having a military dictatorship, they were taking care of your terrorist problem for you.

LEE: Definitely. In fact, it wasn't until really? I think it's important to do comparison contrast because it's better to understand it. I think as we got closer to democracy, to Pinochet surrendering the government in 1990, the rebel activity actually increased the closer they got to that period. When Pinochet was in full control in '82-'85, Santiago was such a wonderful place. For our people that were assigned there, there was generally no problems at all. But as we've learned, times did change.

Q: How about Argentina? This is an interesting period of time in Argentina. How were things going there?

LEE: Very interesting. When I arrived in Panama in mid-late '82, the Malvinas crisis was already underway. For those that are unaware of it, in essence, there was a period of hostility between Argentina and the British government over the Malvinas Islands or the Falkland Islands according to the British government. It was a full-scale military engagement. The United States provided technological help to the British government in terms of the management of that war. The British government won it relatively quickly. It was not much of a war. It was no more significant than the Gulf War in many respects. But again, it was a difficult period because in '83, the first democratic government came into being. The first year that I was there, you had a military junta that was really involved in not only the Dirty War, the disappearance of 30,000 Argentines? In fact, we often at the embassy when I was on inspections in Argentina, there was constantly inquiries by native born Americans or naturalized Americans about the disappeared. I talked to an awful lot of Argentines when I was there on inspections and that whole period of the Dirty War, which came right up until about 1983, was something that most Americans don't remember or don't even think about. But those were periods where people that were sympathetic to the Montoneros, a rebel group, would be put onto C-130 airplanes and flown over the river and just pushed out the back of the aircraft. It was interesting that the U.S. government was not making too many objections about that. So, from a political standpoint, we seemed to be very selective in what we find objectionable. But a very interesting period of time.

Q: I would imagine that since the rebel forces were so busy with each other, we were sort of to one side?

LEE: I think that's true. I would basically call many of our embassies in Latin America caretaker operations where there was not that much going on at a policy level in terms of either development within the country? When you consider that you have either wars or major insurgency in 2/3 of the region, you really could do very little development of an economic nature. The drug trade was beginning to really escalate. That was becoming a policy concern for us. Then of course the rebel violence, which was potentially jeopardizing the safety of our people. You did have some major issues going on, but from my perspective, you just didn't see that much really going on from the standpoint of establishing democracies, although that was a major agenda of President Ronald Reagan.

Q: How about Brazil?

LEE: Brazil in '82-'85 was moving towards democracy. We generally did not have any major problems of a political nature in terms of protecting our people. The Brazilian government, although a developing country, is very developed in many respects, probably one of the more sophisticated societies in Latin America, the seventh largest economy in the world, so that tells you something right there. Our biggest problem was at our consulates in Rio and Sao Paulo where the hyperinflation of the currency was really increasing crime a lot. We did spend a lot of time training people, going through awareness programs, and that kind of thing. But we didn't have the rebel insurgency that we had in the rest of the region.

Q: From time to time, we'd have an American military man assassinated in Sao Paulo, but that probably was earlier on.

LEE: That was earlier. There were cases where people were being targeted, but actually during the period that I was there, we did not have any major political events really affecting what we were trying to get accomplished.

Q: Ronald Reagan made a trip through Latin America. Was that during this period?

LEE: I think the last major event? Of course, Bill Clinton has been to Latin America. Richard Nixon was really the one president that probably visited Latin America the most. I do think Ronald Reagan made some visits.

Q: He made at least one, I think.

LEE: Yes.

Q: But it didn't raise any particular?

LEE: No. I think what many Latin Americans feel is that the U.S. government has never given them proper recognition as a neighbor, as maybe they should. We spent a lot of time in Europe and Asia, but Latin America is the kind of place that we always somehow forget about.

Q: We've done a tour, haven't we?

LEE: One country that we should make reference to is Paraguay. Fascinating country at the time that I was in Panama traveling throughout the region. General Stroessner, of course, was the dictator at that time. They did not end up with democracy until the late '80s. What I found sort of interesting from a historical standpoint is that as the Sandinista movement escalated in Nicaragua in the mid-'70s, resulting in the Sandinista takeover of Nicaragua in '79, in 1980, you have Anastasio Somoza basically being given exile by Stroessner in Paraguay only to later be assassinated by a fascinating rebel operation combined between the Foreign Service nationals, the Sandinista movement, and the Montoneros in Argentina. In fact, it was the Argentina Montoneros that built the rocket launcher that was used against Somoza to kill him in Asuncion in 1980. So, for people that are interested in Latin American history, I find it very intriguing by the turn of events.

Probably to maybe wrap up the discussion of Latin America from the standpoint of my assignments, I guess what I found most powerful in terms of what happened when I was there was the manner in which the Sandinistas took over Nicaragua. You had the administration of Jimmy Carter, who really just sort of let the Sandinistas take over to the detriment of most Nicaraguans. Had Somoza actually remained in power, many of the aspects of Latin America would have probably changed.

Q: Okay. Maybe this is a good place to stop.

LEE: Yes.

Q: We'll pick it up next time in '85. Where did you go?

LEE: In '85, I went back to Washington.

Q: Alright. We'll pick it up then. Great.

[Note: the interview was not completed]

End of interview